ETHNOGRAPHIC COMPARISON

OF A NICHE FASHION GROUP, LOLITA

by

Bayli Berry

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Susan Love Brown, Department of Anthropology and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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Lolita fashion is a small youth fashion that originated in Japan but is inspired by historical western clothing. The clothing is not sexual in nature. Most studies look at the style in Japan, but the fashion has also found popularity overseas. This paper takes an ethnographic approach to studying the Lolita community in the United States by comparing two regional communities, Houston and South Florida. The research found that the largest difference between the two groups was size and community involvement, with Houston as the larger group and the smaller South Florida group being more concerned with group activity. The study found that compared to the strong subversive element of the wearers in Japan, the United States community at large appears to be motivated by Lolita as a creative outlet. There was no support of the idea that aging played a role in what kind of Lolita fashion was worn.

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(All people that are pictured in this work are 18+ years of age)

LOLITA NOMENCLATURE

Comm – short for community, when referring to a regional Lolita community.

Coord – short for coordination, or a coordinated Lolita outfit.

Cosplay – short for "costume play", originally a term used in Japan for a practice of fans of Japanese anime (animation, or animated drawings) wearing the outfits of their favorite characters. Now refers to wearing costumes based off of any type of media across the world.

Harajuku – an area in Toyko, Japan known for it's innovative and often outrageous youth fashion styles.

HLC – stands for Houston Lolita Community the Facebook group; the acronym is more commonly used by the members than the full name.

Ita – a Japanese word for "ouch". Is a descriptive insult used by Lolitas towards other Lolitas to insinuate that they are dressed so badly it is painful to look at. Also used as a noun for someone who dresses badly.

JSK – stands for Jumperskirt, a common type of Lolita dress with no sleeves.

Lolita – a youth fashion of Japanese origin that uses historical Western clothing concepts and incorporates a roughly knee length dress with petticoat. Also, a person who wears Lolita fashion.

Meet up or **Meet** – An organized event by a regional Lolita group, based on doing an activity and dressing up in Lolita together.

OTT – stands for Over The Top; something extravagant.

Print – a dress or skirt with a printed design on it that has been released under a Lolita brand and is referred to by name for easy identification purposes.

Figure 1. A group of South Florida Lolitas. (Photo by: Bayli Berry).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

She was wearing a teacup on her head. It was a rare piece, and she received compliments from the other girls. I asked to take a picture of her, one of many that I took that day, and she graciously agreed. As I looked at the picture after the event, that teacup struck me with just how odd we all must have looked to people unaccustomed to Lolita fashion. With its petticoats and often strange headgear, Lolita fashion is a street fashion that started in the Harajuku area of Tokyo, Japan, and then spread out to the rest of the world. The Harajuku district of Tokyo is an area known for producing a plethora of

unique youth street fashion looks. The fashion is unrelated to the sexual connotations from Nabokov's book of the same name (Kawamura 2012; Monden 2008; Porzio 2012; Rahman et al. 2011). Lolita fashion, although it started in Japan, is based on historical clothing from the British Victorian and French Rococo eras, and spread from its birthplace to a worldwide audience of over fifty countries (Lolita Community Directory 2016). Those interested in the fashion outside of Japan formed online communities, often breaking down into geographical regions. These communities then organize "meet-ups" that happen offline. I have been an active participant in the fashion for approximately nine years, and when I moved from Houston, Texas, to the South Florida area, I noticed certain differences in the way the communities function.

The research outlined in this paper is aimed at getting a further understanding of Western Lolita's ideology in general as well as the differences that might exist between U.S. communities that operate in two different geographical regions. Lolita fashion is usually studied in the context of its country of origin, Japan. By comparing two communities within the United States, it becomes clearer which characteristics are due to difference at the smaller, local level and which are due to fundamental differences in the way Lolita fashion functions in areas outside of Japan. This thesis will attempt to contextualize Lolita fashion within Western or, more specifically, American culture.

Origin of Lolita Fashion

Lolita fashion got its start between the late 1980s and early 1990s and is thought to have gradually evolved from other hyper-feminine looks of the day, which often times had a romantic historical feel to them (Dee 2010). The particular area where Lolita fashion developed was in a neighborhood called Harajuku in Tokyo, Japan.

Harajuku and its Fashion Innovation

Harajuku was already known as an area of unique youth fashion from the 1970s. It was a place to shop and a place to display yourself and your unique fashion to the world. The use of this Harajuku area as a place to parade outrageous new fashion was amplified when two magazines, *FRUiTS* and *KERA*, started circulation in 1997 and 1998, respectively. These magazines included "street snaps", where normal kids with unique fashion style that were walking around in the Harajuku area were sought out for a picture and a few words about their outfits. To be featured in a "street snap" was something to be envied.

But besides just unique individual style, the Harajuku area is known for spawning several distinct fashions that gained popular followings. These fashions were uniform enough that they were easy to identify as belonging to the same group, even with personal creativity and touches added to the outfits. Besides Lolita, other examples of these fashions include Visual Kei, Fairy Kei, Mori (Forest) Girl, Cult Party Kei, and Decora, among others. Decora and Visual Kei are probably the most well-known besides Lolita, in part because they are visually striking. Decora's name indicates "decorative", and its primary feature is the layering of as many cute accessories (including hairclips, keychains, bracelets, and children's toys) on the body as possible. The clothes involved are often simple and serve mostly as a backdrop to the loud and colorful accessories. A backpack or cross-body bag is usually used to layer on more accessories on the bag itself and the strap(s). Extremely accessorized Lolita outfits might be considered to be a cross-over with Decora, depending on the style. Visual Kei is a style associated with certain music acts that made it popular, and involves a darker look, often including cross-

dressing or androgynous looks. The best comparison is to consider it a more modern and darker version of Western glam rock style. Besides Visual Kei, these fashions were and are not related to specific counter- or sub-cultures like the Western Punk or Goth fashions, and have nothing to do with anything besides the clothing and style, making them curious groups for those expecting them to have some overt purpose or ideology.

In Western popular culture, one might be familiar with Gwen Stefani's reference to the Harajuku area and its fashion. In 2004 she started using Japanese and Japanese-American backup dancers, and called them the Harajuku Girls. She mentions Harajuku in many of her songs, with a famous line talking about Harauku girls having "wicked style." She also has released a perfume line called Harajuku Lovers, with the bottles designed to resemble cute cartoon girls wearing fashions that one might see on the streets of the famous neighborhood in Japan. Nowadays the Harajuku streets are becoming an increasingly popular site for tourists, which some believe to be scaring away the fashionable residents and causing more and more of the funky fashion stores to close down ("Japanese Street Fashion – 10 Things You Need to Know in 2016," 2016).

Culture of Cute

Japanese culture was a particularly ripe environment for a fashion like Lolita to erupt. Post-war Japanese culture started to become inundated with "cute" since the early 1970s when the slang word *kawaii* (which roughly translates as "cute") started to be used, (and briefly spawned several other cute baby-type slangs that didn't stick around). The 1970s also saw the creation of a new style of writing, a bubbly, hard-to-read, cute style, predominately adopted by teenage girls. Similarly, the fashion styles for women of the mid-1970s were infantile and baby-like in Japan. The style "matured" a bit and by the

late 1980s the more commonly recognized youthful, not as much “baby”, cute had taken over.

This preference for cute things was originally an organic youth trend, but then was capitalized on by companies producing cute-style goods. The most famous of these companies was Sanrio, the company that birthed the worldwide icon of Hello Kitty. Although originated and driven by young women, a larger “culture of cute” has taken over in Japan and has become normalized. And that cuteness is part of the appeal for a lot of Western Lolitas. When asked what they thought about the insult used in Lolita, *ita* (literally “ouch”), one interview subject replied laughing, “I think it's funny. Honestly, I think — it feels very Japanese to me, too. Like, a cute insult. Instead of being like 'hideous!' they're like, 'oh, it's *ita*!' It's like, cruel, because of what it means. It's like, a nice way to be very cruel and cunning. Which I think is kind of Japanese. Like, you don't come out and say 'you look like *trash*', like 'go home, you slut' something like that, you're gonna be like 'you look *ita*, don't hang out with us' (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December). The popular creation myth in the modern

Figure 2. A modern twist on the very early days of Lolita Fashion. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

Lolita community is that the style naturally evolved during the 1970s/1980s period from less flamboyant styles of the day, notably Otome (Maiden), which is still a distinct style today. Otome and proto-Lolita were styles that emphasized the feminine and romanticized certain historical clothing. The particular historical periods are contested, but the popularly accepted historical periods that influence modern Lolita fashion are British Victorian and French Rococo (Dee 2013; Mackie 2009). The original style was able to emerge because of a special feature of Japan that continues to this day, the so-called "culture of cute", that idealizes youth and everything "cute", and allows the female population of Japan to be the driving factor behind popular culture (Kinsella 1995; Winge 2008). Although Lolita is an extreme example of hyper-feminized cuteness, the country that produced Hello Kitty is also responsible for fostering the creation of such a fashion style.

Structure of Lolita Fashion

Lolita fashion can be broken down at its most simple level to a dress or skirt ending at roughly the knee and held away from the body with a petticoat. And in both the surveys and interviews conducted for this research, it was obvious that Lolitas themselves recognize the petticoat as the most basic and important piece of clothing in a Lolita's arsenal. A more detailed description of the fashion, and one that is often used by more experienced contemporary Lolitas while encouraging new Lolitas, covers the full spectrum of the body. Starting at the head, a Lolita is expected to wear some sort of head accessory. This can be anything as simple as a hair bow to as complicated as a working merry-go-round perched on your crown. For the torso, a blouse or dress is appropriate. If the dress does not have sleeves (called a JSK or jumperskirt), a blouse underneath or a

cardigan over is expected to cover your shoulders. A dress or skirt held aloft by a petticoat next, often with bloomers or shorts underneath for modesty, although these underthings are not typically seen and tend to be talked about less than other parts of Lolita clothing. The legs are expected to be covered with either tights or socks. The socks traditionally must come to either just under the knee or above the knee, but recently ankle socks with lace on the trim have become popular and accepted with some styles. Shoes often aren't discussed but are obviously worn. These things just outlined collectively became known as the "rules" or "guidelines" of the fashion, the bare bones that distinguish Lolita from other fashions. Other topics like how important it is to wear make-up or a wig, or how many accessories are required, are other topics frequently discussed when talking about dressing in Lolita fashion.

Curiously, the term Lolita can also refer to certain masculine styles, rather than the solely feminine style discussed above. These styles are seen as companion styles to Lolita and are often forgotten in descriptions about Lolita and by Lolitas themselves when they discuss the fashion. The concept of masculine style in Lolita is complex, as it seems to be associated *with* Lolita fashion while not quite defined *as* Lolita fashion. Names like Kodona, Boystyle, Ouji (Prince),

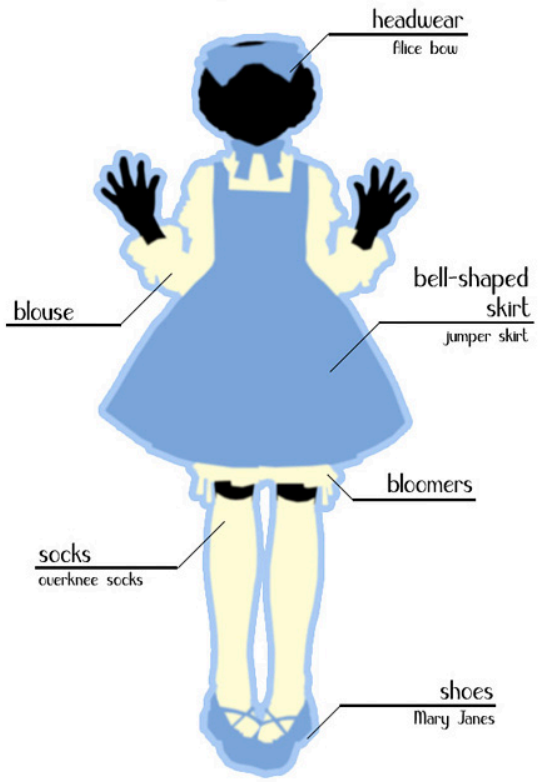

Figure 3. Anatomy of a Lolita Outfit. The smaller text under the lines refer to the specific type of item shown. (Source: Original artist unknown. Public Domain.)

and sometimes Aristocrat refer to the masculine styles. Some participants see distinct differences in these terms, but the largest and most readily apparent difference between the masculine styles is between the childish and more adult versions. Both resemble historical Western male styles. Both styles include shirt and waistcoat, usually headgear, and sometimes jacket (usually seen on the more adult style, however). The main difference is the pants. The adult version exclusively uses long pants for bottoms, while the more childish masculine version employs knickerbockers or short pants of varying lengths instead. The short pants style follows the same vein as the feminine styles, with exposed legs usually expected to be covered with tights or socks.

Lolita clothing is color-coordinated, sometimes in generic color palettes and sometimes to the extreme of everything in the exact same shade of color, and can also sometimes follow themes. These themes can range from fairy tale inspired ones, like Red Riding Hood or the Wicked Queen, or be centered around simple objects, like cats or pancakes. These themes normally arise by what design is on the dress or skirt itself and is then expanded to the accessories. The printed design on Lolita dresses and skirts are given names by the brands that produce them, and those items are referred to as "prints." So when a Lolita talks about wanting a certain print, she is referring to a dress or skirt that has that image printed on it. Certain prints can be highly valued and are known throughout the Lolita community by name, even if they are not in a style a particular Lolita wears. For example, Iron Gate and Sugary Carnival are two names almost inherently known. Lolita outfits — or coordinations, coords for short — can vary vastly in the degree in which they are executed. There can be "casual" coords, which sans petticoat might look pretty normal to the average passerby, and there can be OTT (over

Figure 4. A more casual Lolita outfit. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

Figure 5. An OTT coord themed around rabbits. Taken at a Lolita event in Tampa. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

the top) coords. These are the ones that tend to include things like teacups being worn on the head, and are ridiculously unmistakable as average everyday fashion.

Types of Lolita Clothing

Lolita fashion is often broken down into substyles. These substyles can be considered feminine or masculine styles of Lolita. All feminine substyles share the similar Lolita silhouette discussed above of a knee-length skirt or dress with a petticoat, and the male styles with names like Boystyle and Ouji as discussed previously. There are three main substyles to the feminine Lolita fashion that are worn the most often, with several other less popular substyles. The three main ones are called Classic, Gothic, and Sweet and have distinct stylistic differences from each other. If a participant in Lolita

fashion wears exclusively one substyle, they would be referred by that name (for example, a person who only wears the Sweet substyle of Lolita fashion would be referred to a Sweet Lolita).

Classic Lolita is the most historically based substyle, and it considered to be the most elegant and mature looking of the styles. Classic Lolita tends to include motifs such as crowns, tea, famous paintings/artwork, and florals, among others. The colors used in this style are typically earth and jewel tones.

Gothic Lolita, like its name implies, is very similar to Western Romantic Goth fashion (Romantic Goth is the more historically based Goth fashion). It shares color palettes, like an abundance of blacks with flashes color, and themes like religious iconography, bats, and horror/the grotesque. It could perhaps be seen as belonging to the Classic substyle from its more historical influence, but participants in Lolita fashion consider it to be a separate and distinct substyle. This might be influenced by the origin of the fashion in Japan and its subsequent spread under the moniker Gothic Lolita (sometimes shortened to "Goth-Loli") and the first English language community titling itself EGL, which stands for Elegant Gothic Lolita. The first English language adopters of the fashion were indeed interested most in the Gothic style of Lolita, as it was an exciting new spin on something that was already familiar to them.

Sweet Lolita is perhaps the most unique of the main substyles. It is considered the most childish, and presents itself primarily in pastels with themes like cute animals and, as the name implies, every manner of sweets imaginable. While Classic or Gothic can be described at elegant, Sweet can be called nothing but adorable. And because of its lack of obvious historical markers, its ostentatious cuteness is completely alien sight for those

not familiar with it. When asked why they thought Sweet Lolita was so popular, one interview subject replied, “I think it's probably the most jarring, and different, of all of society. If people really want to go about and break the rules of society, which is sometimes why I feel like Lolita's so popular, they go to Sweet. Because they're just like 'this is different, this is *so* fucking cute.' People these days are all into *kawaii* [Japanese word for ‘cute’], like even people that aren't into Lolita, they just love *kawaii*, *kawaii*, *kawaii*. And, surrounding themselves in *kawaii* in whatever way they can. It's like, 'Hey I've got $200 to spend, you know, bada bing bada boom here's a Sweet Lolita coord, fuck

Figure 6. A Classic Lolita coordination. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

Figure 7. An outfit from the Gothic substyle. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

Figure 8. A Sweet Lolita coordination. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

society, whooo'" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December). These three main substyles are considered to be distinct in theory, but often in practice the lines are more blurred. In particular, a Sweet-Classic blend has become popular nowadays. The less popular substyles as mentioned before tend to fall easily into other categories. Styles like Hime (Princess), Country, and Sailor fall under the blanket of Classic. More uncommon substyles like Wa-Lolita (Lolita which includes elements of traditional Japanese dress, like a kimono sleeved top) and Punk Lolita are worn so rarely that they are often forgotten.

Figure 9. A Punk Lolita outfit. Punk Lolita is not very commonly seen anymore. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

Figure 10. A Wa Lolita outfit. Wa Lolita can be a controversial style among Lolitas. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

Figure 11. An outfit blending Sweet and Classic substyles. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

Categories of Clothing

For all substyles, Lolita clothing can be broken down into types. These four types include handmade, brand, indie, offbrand. Handmade is obviously clothing that has been handmade, usually either for oneself or a friend, and is non-professional work. When well constructed with high quality materials, handmade clothing is regarded very highly, as it shows a great amount of skill. When the work is poorly sewn or done with very cheap materials, however, it is often severely looked down upon. The importance of the quality of the materials is a trend seen throughout all kinds of Lolita clothing. Lace in particular is highly scrutinized for its quality, with low grade raschel lace, the kind often found on cheap fast fashion items, looked down upon the most. Lace included on Lolita clothing items from specific Lolita brands can include custom made designs that match the theme of the dress or include the brand name.

Figure 12. A close-up of the lace on a dress. Angelic Pretty's Whipped Magic Chest Ribbon JSK has custom made lace that shows both brand labeling (AP, short for Angelic Pretty) and cupcakes to match the theme of the dress. (Photo by Bayli Berry)

Brand is short for brand name clothing, and is from Japanese labels that produce exclusively Lolita clothing. These brands have existed since the beginnings of Lolita fashion in Japan, and all have English names. The four main ones are Baby, the Stars Shine Bright (which also has a sister brand that came later, Alice and the Pirates), Angelic Pretty, Metamorphose, and Innocent World. Like brand name clothing for normal fashions, these clothing pieces are often very highly priced and valued, costing from $250-$400 for a typical dress. Unlike the larger fashion market though, there is a thriving resale community for Lolita clothing, and getting a Brand item new is not nearly as important as having it in excellent condition. And while most Lolita clothing items do depreciate in value over time in the secondhand market, particularly famous and well-liked dresses may double in value from what the original designers sold them for.

Because of its higher prices than other options for Lolita clothing, Brand has a sort of elite status, which is sometimes perceived negatively and sometimes positively. A Lolita might jokingly call themselves a Brand Whore, or another Lolita might comment they are jealous about the amount of Brand someone else has. Getting Brand outside of Japan can be somewhat of a hassle because of language barriers, customs taxes, and the fact they used to not ship overseas. However, now most Brand companies not only ship overseas, but also have brick-and-mortar locations in different countries that also serve as international shipping outlets. Baby, the Stars Shine Bright (along with the sister brand Alice and the Pirates) has locations in Paris, San Francisco, and New York. Angelic Pretty also has a store in San Francisco, and Innocent World is licensed to at least one store in New York called Tokyo Rebel.

Indie is a fairly recent term that refers to smaller independent brands, which are often non-Japanese, ranging from Korean, Chinese, Australian, European, and South/North American and that produce their own unique designs. These pieces of clothing are usually, but not always, of lower quality than brand. The non-Chinese options are typically slightly cheaper than Japanese Brand, but not by a substantial amount, running in the $200-$300 range for a dress. The advantage of these besides the slightly cheaper price is the wider variety of styles available, the support of a smaller business, and the ease of the international shipping. The Chinese indie brands on the other hand, while each having their own company name, are typically lumped together under the name of Taobao, which is a Amazon.com-type of Chinese website that the companies use as their selling platform. The brands commonly will not ship overseas and usually have limited English language skills because their target audience is Chinese Lolitas, so for international Lolitas a shopping service is used as a go-between. Some of the larger and more popular Taobao Lolita brands have seen the potential expansion into an overseas market and started selling and shipping direct to overseas customers, either by email order or through a partner site of Taobao, AliExpress. While again, the advantage is a wider selection of styles, a lot of Taobao brands' main attraction is the price. For $50-$150 for a decent to good quality dress, its easy to see why Taobao has become an increasingly popular option.

Offbrand is a large blanket term given to clothing that does not fall in the previous three categories. It can be something from a fast fashion outlet like Forever 21 that was never meant for Lolita fashion but works well with the style, or a cheap basic design from a not well known Lolita clothing company.

An interesting addition to the main categories is from a company called Bodyline. Although it would seem to fall in the indie or offbrand categories, it is always referred to specifically by name. Founded by a Chinese entrepreneur in Japan, the store originally sold lingerie, sexy costumes, and very bad quality Lolita clothing. It was detested and looked on with scorn from many Lolitas until they started upping the quality of the Lolita options, all while keeping price tags much lower than Brand and offering international shipping. This was before indie brands (including Taobao) became viable options, and originally they sold rather basic designs (with the occasional direct replica of a Brand item thrown in). Currently they do design their own unique dresses and maintain a better level of quality, but those who wear it still maintain a certain sense of shame and often justify wearing it by saying things like "this dress is actually pretty good quality for Bodyline," and a favorite suggestion when planning to wear Lolita clothing where it might get dirty is to wear Bodyline.

I would like to make it very clear that the styles and types of clothes discusses and outlined above are from the English-speaking communities perspective. The English language Lolita communities and the Japanese Lolita community do not commonly come into contact with one another outside of the Japanese clothing brands, and it would be a gross fallacy to compare the two as if they were the same entity. More discussion about the difference will be discussed later in this paper. I would also like to clarify that these descriptions apply to the *current* English language Lolita fashion communities, and, like all fashions, Lolita has evolved since its first introduction outside of Japan. It goes through trends and styles just like anything else. A lot of the early styles of Lolita fashion are now considered to be completely out of fashion, besides specific outfits referred to as

Old School Lolita, which is still a modern take on the old styles. This is why there may be some discrepancy in descriptions between older research on Lolita fashion and this work. The differences displayed between this work and future research into Lolita fashion will no doubt also be striking.

Why is the Fashion Called Lolita?

For a Western audience, one might assume that the word Lolita refers to the book by Vladimir Nabokov, whose titular character is named Lolita. The book is a love story from the point of view of a pedophile and was adapted into a movie directed by Stanley Kubrick in 1962. The movie romanticizes further the relationship between the pedophile and Lolita, and suggests that the young girl (played by a 14-year-old in the movie) was leading him on. From this movie adaption, the term Lolita (in the West) came to be a slang term for an overly sexual young girl.

The name has been a point of contention for many followers of Lolita fashion, who wish to completely dissociate it from the Nabokov book, and often write it off as an unfortunate label given by ignorant media sources (Gagné 2008; Dee 2013). Lolitas do not view the fashion as sexual in any way and vehemently reject anyone who tries to sexualize it. Objective facts on the exact origin of the name have eluded other researchers as well (Gagné 2008). There have been attempts among Lolitas to change the name of the fashion; however, they are never successful, becoming a nickname for the style at most, or an acronym like EGL (which stands for Elegant Gothic Lolita) (Dee 2013). Existing studies on Lolita fashion agree that it has nothing to do with the sexuality of Nabokov's book or Kubrick's film adaptation (Hinton 2013; Kawamura 2012; Monden 2008; Porzio 2012; Rahman et al. 2011). Rahman et al, whom completed their research in Hong Kong,

use the first sentence of their abstract to strike any comparison between the book and the fashion whatsoever (2011). However, it is likely there is some relationship with the novel and the name is not just coincidentally the same, as some Lolitas choose to believe. Researcher Masafumi Monden, who studied Japanese Lolitas, sees the link with the theme of youth but not the sexuality. He compares the Japanese Lolita fashion to the "American 'Lolita'" (a sexualized young girl) and neatly sums up his point here:

> [A]lthough those who dress in this fashion style often overemphasise demureness and sweetness, which conceivably appeal to some men, Japanese Lolitas also tend to endorse the egoism and cruelty associated with childhood rather than its innocence, naiveté or submissiveness. Thus, they do not seem to endorse passivity or vulnerability. Moreover, their emphasis on sweetness and cuteness, both in fashion and manners, does not, at least not intentionally, evoke vulnerability, availability, or willingness to fuel male fantasies as… American "Lolita" does (2008, 28).

Another researcher, Perry Hinton, dedicates an entire paper to outlining the connection between *Lolita* the book and Lolita fashion in detail. He concludes that they are associated through a very convoluted connection driven around different cultural interpretations, which also leaves Lolita fashion devoid of the sexual connotation a Western audience might impose on it.

> In the West, through the way the book was represented (and re-presented) as involving a transgressive representation of childhood sexuality, the representation of Lolita changed from the exploited child of the book to an older teenage sexual vamp portrayed in the movies…. The Western media, by applying this representation to aspects of modern of Japanese culture, have misrepresented both the use of the term in Japan and its cultural context…. Within this [Japanese] context, the term *Lolita* positively represents the young shoujo [girl] dealing with, or attempting to escape from, an unpleasant adult world. This representation of Lolita bears a closer resemblance to the Lolita in the book—a girl who wishes to enjoy her girlhood pleasures of celebrities, magazines, soda fountains, and tennis—than to the sexualized vamp portrayed in Western media. This Japanese representation of Lolita is the foundation of the fashion style (2013, 1597).

Lolita's themselves find the name misleading and tiresome to deal with. As one interview subject puts it: "I think Lolita, the term Lolita, should be dropped completely from the fashion and we should rename it. The negative association with the book, it's really detrimental to our community, and half the time we have to spend more time defending the fashion than enjoying it, so, I really think we should -there should be a movement within the Lolita fashion groups to steer away from that name" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December). Some Lolitas even try to avoid saying the name at all around non-Lolitas, just as a preventative measure against misunderstanding.

Clothing, Costume, or Both

So why, if Lolita is not recognized by most of society and is sometimes worn based on elaborate fairy tale "themes", is it referred to as a fashion and not a costume? For Lolitas, it's a delicate subject. A lot of Lolitas get extremely defensive when someone calls it a costume or cosplay (costume play), but some recognize that OTT and themed coords can fall in a blurred territory. When asked in the interviews conducted about why they didn't like the association, some struggled with the concept and were unable to explain, while others were more eloquent. As one participant put it, "With Lolita… you are *yourself*. You are making a physical representation of yourself. And for it to be considered a costume, when you're trying to be someone else, or a cosplayer, when you're trying to be other people, it's an insult to who you are and what you are trying to do for yourself. Because everyone has their reasons for doing Lolita.…The main difference is — Lolita you are being *your* true self, instead of imitating someone" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December). And along the same lines,

another interviewee gave an analogy using regular clothes: “[It’d] be like if you were wearing a T-shirt with like a pizza on it or something and someone coming up to you, like, 'I like your pizza costume' and you're like 'What? It's just a pizza shirt, I don't understand.' …it feels weird someone coming and making a comment on your clothing, even though I know that Lolita is like, out there, right, like it's drawing attention. Still, having that idea, someone thinking that I'm just playing dress up for the day, is kind of strange.” (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a Houston Lolita by author. December). As she states, she understands that it’s not a perfect comparison because Lolita is rather different from average clothing, but the feeling is the same for her as if someone thought her pizza T-shirt were a costume.

And as for why Lolitas can get so defensive on the subject, one Lolita has this answer: “They're not trying to dress up as someone, they're dressing to reflect themselves. So I think it's more of like, a vulnerable position that you put yourself in a little bit, so, I think a lot of people take it personally” (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December). Regardless of reasoning, it’s obvious that those involved with Lolita clothing see it as a fashion and not a costume. And they may have a point, but first we need to look at what *is* considered costume.

A word now in the popular lexicon the world over, to “cosplay” is the act of dressing as a fictional character, and is typically associated with fan communities of graphic novels, video games, animation, and sci-fi/fantasy. Theresa Winge in a 2006 paper on cosplay in Japan noted that the origin is contested, but the most likely explanation is that it first started in the United States with people like Star Trek fans in the 1960s. She states that the idea transferred to Japan in 1984 when a man named

Takahashi Nobuyuki, who was associated with an anime (animation) studio, attended World-Con, a science fiction convention in the United States. After he returned to Japan he urged anime fans to participate in what he called "costume play," which was eventually shortened to "cosplay".

Research into cosplay and costuming often share the common theme of performance of an assumed character. Cosplayers (those who cosplay) are seen as usually considering their audience in a performance of the character (whether purely physical or by acting as well), whereas research into Lolita tends to delve into *identity* and why exactly do these young women wear these outrageous and impractical petticoats. There are similarities between cosplay and Lolita, but they are not the same and are not researched as such. As far as similarities go, escapism is definitely a subject discussed about both cultures. And Lolita, like all fashions, can be said to be performing for an audience like cosplay. However, that performance is of their personal identity. To be a cosplayer might be considered a part of a person's identity, but when a person cosplays, they are assuming an identity not their own (either only physically or role-playing) and are not trying to claim it as their own authentic personality. For example, in Rahman, Wing-sun, and Cheung's research on cosplay, they talk about being an authentic cosplayer is directly linked to how well they assume their character. "It is evident that staying 'in character' was a primary criterion of authenticity for many cosplay enthusiasts…—visual/concrete and narrative/abstract" (2012, 329). Most Lolitas do not see themselves as assuming any sort of character. The few times I have witnessed a Lolita obviously acting different because they were wearing Lolita (assuming a "delicate" manner or raising the pitch of their voice), the effect on the other Lolitas was not

admiration, but annoyance. Studies about Lolita are usually interested in how it forms into the identity of the participants (Feldman-Barrett 2013; Gagné 2008; Hinton 2013; Kawamura 2012; Rahman et al. 2011; Winge 2008; Younker 2011). And because the motivations for wearing Lolita fashion is a focus of so much of the research on it (usually based on Japanese culture and then blanketing their conclusions over the international communities), this study seeks to contribute beyond just questions of identity.

As mentioned before, Lolitas tend to vehemently deny being cosplayers or wearing a costume. It is important to a lot of them that they are recognized as wearing a fashion, and not a costume, with the implication that because it is a fashion it is somehow better. One author that studied Lolita in Japan, Issac Gagné, notes its continued negative identification with other groups, a common practice in subcultural groups, with cosplay being a main example of negative identification. That is, by Lolitas defining their garb as "not cosplay", they can say it is a part of their true identity and not an assumed character. Gagné also offers that cosplay in particular is a hot point because they shared physical territory at the time of his research. As previously discussed, the Harajuku area is a hot spot for those who wore Lolita fashion. A famous place there, Jingū Bridge, was known in particular for being a place to congregate, for both Lolitas and cosplayers in the mid-2000s, before losing popularity among first the Lolitas and then the cosplayers (Galbraith 2013).

Lolitas, like everyone, tend to celebrate the thing they are willingly investing time and money in. That combined with other people's negative reactions to the clothing style have encouraged Lolitas to become extremely in-group and territorial. Cosplay is not the only group they negatively associate with, and being accepted into the group can be

tough. As noted by a blog that covers Harajuku fashion, Lolitas tend to be camera shy to those not in the group. The author of the blog attributes it to mistrust of what will happen to the photos ("Japanese Street Fashion – 10 Things You Need to Know in 2016," 2016). The author doesn't go into detail, but the implication is that they will be either mocked or sexualized when they do not wish to be. To be truly accepted into a Lolita group, the most important requirement is dressing well. That means that those new to the fashion (thus those who have less knowledge about what is expected and what looks good for this unusual clothing) have a high barrier to cross. For example, when asked how long she had been interested in the fashion, one interview subject made a distinction between the time she was *interested*, and the time she had been "wearing it correctly" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a Houston Lolita by author. December). However, special dispensation is reserved for those new to the fashion and willing to accept criticism. In fact, several interview subjects mentioned the mentoring aspect of Lolita in some way. One Lolita went as far to define the Lolita insult for someone dressed badly, *ita*, in terms of who would or would not accept advice from more experienced Lolita. As in, for them an *ita* was someone who received advice, or knew the expected form of Lolita, and didn't care and butchered the style anyway (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December).

Gender

Gender is an interesting topic in Lolita. As discussed before, Lolita is unusual in that it is a primarily female driven subcultural type fashion. The vast majority of Lolitas identify as women, and when discussing Lolita in the interviews for this study, the default was to use female pronouns to refer to Lolitas in general. Men do exist in the fashion, but

from observation the majority are involved with the adult masculine partner-style to Lolita covered previously. There is also a sense among Lolitas, although it may not be actual fact, that these men are strongly encouraged by their friends or girlfriends to participate so they can be used as a kind of living accessory to their Lolita outfit. Deerstalker Pictures, a YouTube channel known for doing videos about Lolita, often humorous ones, has a video titled *Ouji Accessory*. The video presents itself as an infomercial to buy an Ouji accessory to match your outfit and hold your bags (Deerstalker Pictures 2014). Even though it's obviously exaggerated for comedic effect, the point that men are expected to take a supportive role comes across clearly. The younger looking version of Lolita's masculine partner, the one that employs short pants and knickerbockers, is almost exclusively worn by women. In fact, the brands that produce the clothing for this style usually only offer the pieces in a cut suitable for a woman's body.

Men who wear the feminine form of Lolita seem to be much rarer, perhaps in part because men are treated with great skepticism by Lolitas. When men show an interest in the fashion, especially older men, the young women that comprise the majority of Lolitas become suspicious. The feeling is that these older men are more likely to sexualize the fashion and the participants, and again, Lolitas tend to violently reject any form of sexualization. And within the gossip vines of Lolita, there are always stories about "that one guy" they were nice to and let join the community, but he turned out to be fulfilling some sexual fetish, or perhaps sexually harassing or assaulting the other members. As to the truth of these stories, I have never been privy to firsthand knowledge of any such story and cannot say if it is a legitimate problem or an unfound paranoia. Regardless, this

undoubtedly has an effect on the demographics of current Lolita communities. Men who are accepted and wear the feminine form of the fashion are referred to as "Brolitas" and tend to be teenagers and young men. The fact that they have special designation, and a humorous one at that, again points to their difference amongst the primarily female population of Lolitas.

The gender divide in Lolita stems in part from its origins in Japan. The Japanese "culture of cute" discussed before is driven by young women. In Western postwar youth cultures, like those studied by Dick Hebdige in his famous book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, it can be seen that these movements are propelled by young men, and that women are largely passive participants. For Japan, the reverse is true, and men are consumers of cute culture but with no real contribution. As Kinsella puts it, "Young [unmarried] women — by virtue of the strength of their oppression and exclusion from most of the labour market and thus from active social roles - have come to represent in the media the freest, most un-hampered elements of society" (1995, 244). This "freedom" allows them to be the generators of popularity with a certain amount of authenticity. As for the continuance of this power dynamic outside of Japan, a Portuguese study claims that men exclude themselves because of an "avoidance of femininity" (Augusta and Monteiro 2011, 28). This study also suggests that for men who wear the feminine style of Lolita, the ideal is to completely obscure any masculine traits and instead adopt the completely feminine.

Figure 13. Breaking Lolita stereotypes. Like many other male Lolitas, he does not like the Brolita label because its attempted humorous tone can come across as divisive and mocking. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

Lolita Fashion's Expansion Outside of Japan

Japan Exports its Pop Culture

Japan was recognized in Douglas McGray's *Foreign Policy* article in 2009 for becoming a master of "soft power" — a term first used by Joseph S. Nye Jr. in 1990. When the concept of "soft power" was first used, it was in regards to American culture being consumed internationally, thus giving America "power" other than military might. In Douglas McGray's *Foreign Policy* article, "Japan's Gross National Cool" Nye's "soft power" term was used to describe the fervor for Japanese cultural exports (2009). Japanese food, art, entertainment, and fashion were all becoming popular in the overseas market. Japan's government caught on to this and launched its own attempts to foster this movement, called "Cool Japan." The popular spread of Lolita fashion to the world outside of Japan happened largely with the spread of anime and these other cultural products of the country in the early 2000s (Ahn 2007; Augusta and Monteiro 2011; Ruh 2012). Lolita is very much a part of the Cool Japan agenda pushed by the Japanese government. They appointed three *kawaii taishi* (cute ambassador) in March 2009 — one representing "Harajuku style", one "school uniform style", and one Lolita. The original Lolita *Kawaii* Ambassador was Misako Aoki, a very popular model for Lolita fashion. She still operates in her position as *Kawaii* Ambassador, and dutifully travels to other countries to spread Japanese cute. Honorary *Kawaii* Ambassadors have been and continue to be chosen from different countries around the world as a good-will gimmick and PR boost.

English Language Social Media

Lolita fashion spread and thrived as most global products do now, through the internet, forming interest groups and then local regional communities. Although never making it into the consciousness of the general public outside of Japan, the fashion style has small followings in 56 countries worldwide, on all continents besides Antarctica (Lolita Community Directory 2016). The first successful online English language group for Lolita was a LiveJournal community called EGL (standing for Elegant Gothic Lolita, one of the earlier alternative monikers). This success of this community caused it to spread into the creation of other Lolita fashion related interest groups, such as EGL Comm Sales (a place to buy and sell secondhand Lolita clothing), Daily Lolita (a place to post pictures of yourself wearing Lolita) and others. Local groups also arose. A Texas based group was created in 2003, and an even more localized Houston one was created in 2007. As LiveJournal declined in popularity, and Facebook began to reign supreme, those involved with Lolita fashion naturally followed. The Houston Lolita Community Facebook group was created in 2011, and the South Florida Lolitas in 2012.

Facebook now holds many general Lolita interest groups as well, with the old standards of buying/selling and picture posting, but also groups like Lolita Updates (a place to discuss the latest releases from Lolita brands) and Lolita Humor (a place for Lolita related jokes or memes). Because of Lolita's niche status, these social media groups were the foundation of why Lolita was able to find followings overseas and enjoy such longevity as a fashion. Without social media, the small numbers interested in Lolita fashion would have had a much harder time finding support for their interest, and Lolita might not have gained any traction at all overseas. The regional Lolita communities'

Figure 14. Close up of a Gothic coordinate. Taken at a Lolita event in Tampa. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

geographic area claim seems to be related to Lolita density. Some communities are for the whole country, like Ecuador and Denmark, while others like the South Florida Lolitas are regional based, and even city oriented, like the Houston Lolita Community.

Difference from Japan

When looking at the background of Lolita fashion, it can be easy to think that the various aspects of Lolita fashion community in Japan simply transferred into Western groups along with the clothes. Western Lolitas themselves tend to forget that they are not part of some completely unified group, which pops up when certain Western Lolitas who

have traveled and spent time with Lolitas in Japan come back and make remarks about the differences ("There's members of our community who've been over there [to Japan], and from what they have said, they're a little *harsher*" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December).

Lolita fashion in Japan has been a source of research for a while now, and studies reveal that Lolita in Japan serves a subversive purpose (Groom 2011; Younker 2011). The women who participate in Lolita are understood to be embracing childhood selfishness. Like the Kinsella article discussed before, the "culture of cute" that exists was able to encourage such an extravagant and cute style because of Japanese ideas of responsibility. Adults are saddled with so much responsibility, either with a harsh work life or devoting everything they can for their families, that the nostalgia for childhood is even greater. After all, as a child they had no responsibilities, they were allowed to be selfish and even cruel, and they typically received an allowance from their parents. It's easy to see why Japanese Lolitas might be wishing to grasp some of that time back. Christine Yano, who wrote a book about Hello Kitty and its international presence, supports this. She argues "that kyarakuta ['characters,' like Hello Kitty] transform the adult world — fraught with responsibilities, dangers, and global matters — into a haven of play and nostaligized childhood" (2013, 11). Terasa Younker, a woman who lived in Japan and worked briefly at two different Japanese Lolita brands' companies, wrote in an article on the subject that explained that part of Lolita fashion's appeal in Japan was the recapturing of this freedom of youth. She had this comment on Sweet Lolitas in particular: "At first glance the Lolita persona may appear to be the spoiled, petulant, stupid-but-pretty girl aesthetic so distressing to feminists. When compared to the

traditional Japanese model of a woman as a subservient, long-suffering daughter, wife, and mother, however, the selfish, in-your-face Lolita aesthetic is surprisingly subversive." Younker views the subcultural tendencies of the fashion, a refusal of the mainstream (as defined by Dick Hebdige in 1979), as an attraction for many of the women (2011). They are snatching at a time when they were not saddled with the mantle of responsibility. And for those who are not yet considered adults, it is a way of putting off the inevitable. Lolita in Japan is therefore a subversive rebellion unlike the loud, in-your-face type of youth rebellions Western countries tend to deal with.

Communities for Lolita Fashion

Lolita has two main types of groups online, global interest groups and local regional communities. Global interest groups, as discussed before, are language based (usually English, as the *lingua franca* of the world) and deal with all Lolitas who speak that language. There are gossip groups, general chat groups, mentoring groups, makeup groups, plus-sized groups, humor groups, news groups, and generally anything a person could think of. At one point in the past there was even a baking community for Lolitas. These groups are mostly on Facebook now, and deal with the group members solely online, but do seem to generate genuine friendships. The local communities, however, are regional based as to facilitate real life meetings for its members, as well as to discuss local happenings (such as the stupid-hot weather being unreasonable for Lolita, or who received their latest Angelic Pretty print in the mail). The organized meetings are called "meet-ups" (or shortened to simply "meets") and revolve around some sort of activity to do while dressed in Lolita fashion and hang out with other Lolitas. Past events I've attended range from museum visits, going to a movie theater, ice skating in a mall, a

simple meal at a restaurant, indoor putt-putt golf, strawberry picking, and various other activities that are easy to do as a group. But by far and away, the most popular event for the United States Lolitas is to attend tea, or high tea it is sometimes called. This involves going to a teahouse and drinking tea while eating little cakes and savories from tiered trays. Drinking tea is seen as somehow intrinsically linked with Lolita, probably from the Victorian influence in the clothing style. It also might be a form of Western nostalgia for childhood, where young girls often hold tea parties while playing dress up.

Meet-ups can be hosted by any member of the group, but organizing can be seen as unnecessarily troublesome or a bother (as wrangling any group of humans for an event can be), so the task is mostly taken on by the mods of the community. Mods (shortened from moderators, as in moderators of content) are a longstanding tradition of any group on the internet. Mods in general are those who delete inappropriate content, make rules for what is allowed in the group, ban people who don't follow the rules, and are generally considered "in charge." And on Facebook and many other sites, they also control who joins or has access to the group in the first place. The policies of the mods can have an impact on the make up of the group. For example, the Houston Lolita Community, with its 800+ members, has a rather relaxed policy about who is allowed to join, and is not known for being particular about deleting inactive accounts from its member roster. South Florida Lolitas, on the other hand, has a basic application type process, and does semi-regular purges to get rid of inactive members, bringing its membership numbers normally to the 50-80 range.

Large events also happen that are not limited to only one regional community. A few years back there was a gigantic meet-up at Disney World for whoever wanted to join

in across the globe. A Lolita convention called HelloCon used to take place in Helsinki, Finland, on a sort-of-annual basis (they have now switched to smaller events). The U.S. has its equivalent called RuffleCon, that technically bills itself as an "Alternative Fashion Conference" to appeal to a wider audience, but photos from the event reveal it is stacked with primarily Lolitas. There are also much smaller conventions aimed at a wider range than just one Lolita community, like the mini-convention that debuted in 2017 in Tampa, Florida, called Cakes & Couture, a one day event advertising itself as a "Japan Fashion Conference." The usual idea behind these conventions is to sell tickets and provide panels, entertainment, special guests, and shopping. The panels provided are on interesting topics that are related (like 2015 Rufflecon's "Queer Masculinities: Brolitas" panel) or not-really-related (like 2016 RuffleCon's "History of Prohibition and the Cocktail 21 and over panel," which may or may not have gotten all the guests sloshed) to Lolita or alternative fashion. The entertainment always includes a fashion show, and typically some sort of musical act or dance. The special guests involved are designers from Lolita (or other alternative fashion) brands, famous models in the alternative fashion world, and researchers who have studied Lolita or other alternative fashions, like Yuniya Kawamura. The shopping provided by official brands also presents a major advantage to attending the convention, because most Lolita clothing is bought online using bust/waist/height measurements. For an opportunity to feel a dress's fabric, and perhaps even try it on, is quite a luxury.

Figure 15. A couple from Houston, Texas. They traveled to a Lolita event in Tampa, Florida, to support a friend who was a vendor at the event. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

Japanese culture conventions and anime conventions also sometimes cater to Lolitas. One convention that was particularly inclusive of Lolita-related events, guests, and shopping, was held in Houston, Texas, and called Anime Matsuri. Anime Matsuri catered to a wider audience than simply fans of Japanese animation by hosting an import car show and many events/guests appealing to Lolitas. It was once a major draw for Lolitas both in the Texas area and in the United States in general. The convention's director and his wife used to be very involved with the Houston Lolita Community on Facebook, and was a source of pride for Houston Lolitas to have such a great event in their home city. However, in 2014, the director of the convention was the center of a

leadership schism of HLC, which led to a well-known mod leaving the group. The main quarrel seemed to be about how much control the director of Anime Matsuri had in the group and that he was advertising too much. A while after this, allegations about the director sexual harassing Lolitas started trickling in (Rouner 2015). A prominent Lolita fashion blogger started a petition to boycott the convention (Sanders 2015). Shortly after this, the director and his wife opened a Lolita fashion shop in Houston.

The convention (and by association, the shop) still holds some notoriety around them currently. The official stance of the Houston Lolita Community Facebook group now is that it is too controversial a subject to discuss at all. One of the rules of the community is that all posts regarding the shop or convention will be locked (which makes responding to the post impossible) after a mod posts a link. The link is to a document in the HLC Facebook group that says posts around the subject often get too heated and such discussion is not healthy for the community. It also links the convention's and shop's Facebook pages and websites, as well as two news articles about the scandal, two blog posts, and a video by a Lolita discussing the controversy over the shop.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH

Two Lolita Groups: Houston and South Florida

Because Lolitas tend to see themselves and be studied as a whole unit, even across countries, almost no attention has been paid to differences between groups. This study not only looks at the United States Lolitas as a unique unit, outside of the origin group in Japan, but also at two regional Lolita communities within the United States. These two groups were chosen to be studied because of the researcher's previous relationship with them, and the accessibility to the researcher.

The Houston Lolita Community, most commonly referred to by its acronym HLC, is a Facebook group spin-off of the original LiveJournal group, the Houston Lolita Community. The original Houston LiveJournal community was created in 2007, and the Facebook group in 2011. The regional predecessor to both of these was the Texan Gothic Lolitas community on LiveJournal, started in 2003. The South Florida Lolitas Facebook group seems to have spawned directly from the general state Florida LiveJournal communities (two concurrent communities existed for Florida Lolitas). Both Florida Lolita LiveJournals were started in 2004, and the South Florida Lolitas Facebook group in 2012. I had been a part of the original Houston LiveJournal community and made the transition to the Facebook group around when it was first created in 2011. When I moved to Florida for school in 2014, I joined the South Florida Facebook group. I am still a current member of both online groups, and actively attend the in-person meet-ups for the South Florida group. These two communities have varying obvious differences and

similarities, outside of those surveyed for. Both splintered off from LiveJournal groups that initially included the entire state. Both areas share a hot and humid climate. Climate is important with Lolitas because it affects what they wear (how many layers, what types of fabrics, just how important is that rule about wearing a blouse with your dress etc.) and when they wear it (at outdoor/indoor activities, during certain seasons, etc.). Both are "closed groups" on Facebook, meaning the mods of the community have to approve members, and only members can see the content of the group. Here is where the obvious similarities end.

The clear differences start with their mere categorization. The Houston group is based around a city and its suburbs (referred to as the Greater Houston Area), and the South Florida group lists their members as belonging to Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. One might suspect the Houston group to be the smaller group because of its regional category as a city, however, HLC has 887 members (with 8 mods), while the South Florida Lolitas only have 70 (with 6 mods) as of April 27, 2017. Over the course of the study, the South Florida community has fluctuated in member size, at one point being over 100 members, but then pared down to slightly over 50. HLC membership has stayed roughly the same, at the 800+ level, with slowly growing membership. It is impossible to tell how many members of each group are actually active, however. The Houston group has a more lax system for joining (simply clicking "Join Group" will usually get you approved), and does not weed out inactive members very often, if ever. The South Florida Lolitas has a slightly stricter system for joining (a tiny application form that must be sent to a mod if you do not have any friends already in the group) and they do periodically go through their members to boot out inactive ones. The mod per member

ratio is also obviously in South Florida's favor, although it seems to be a rule that every group across the internet has at least one mod who doesn't actually do anything.

Research Questions

Rules of the Fashion and Lolita Culture

As I mentioned earlier, there are certain rules or guidelines expected to be followed, often referred to as required for the Lolita silhouette. I will refer to them as rules for simplicity's sake, but the issue is not that simple. The rules are understood by Lolitas as what enables Lolita fashion to exist. In the interviews, all the Lolitas referenced in some way to the fact that, without these rules, the fashion would not have a distinct look at all, and therefore could not be called a distinct name. They also all agreed that the petticoat is the quintessential piece of equipment in the Lolitas' arsenal. Without the petticoat, the Lolita silhouette staple of the poofed out skirt would not exist. Therefore the petticoat is the defining feature of the Lolita outfit. Everyone seems to agree on this on a basic level, but I will not pretend it is a unanimous opinion. There have been discussions in the past (one in particular was centered around a popular blogger) about the importance of a petticoat. For if an outfit followed all the rules of Lolita, except for the petticoat, why would it not be considered Lolita anymore?

However, the petticoat is the least controversial of the rules. The most heated debate always comes back to the rule about wearing a blouse. While a blouse with a skirt is a given, and a dress with sleeves requires no blouse underneath, a dress without sleeves, called a "jumperskirt" (more commonly known by its acronym JSK) is where the controversy arises. A JSK worn without a blouse under it can be a very divisive subject.

Those in hot climates seem to take this argument more seriously. An extra layer of fabric makes quite the difference when it is over 90°F.

Along this vein, heat also makes a difference when wearing wigs. Anyone who has ever worn a costume wig to a summer sport event or a warm Halloween party knows that wigs can get extremely hot and uncomfortable pretty quickly. Although at the beginning of Lolita fashion's popularity in the West wigs were not initially all that common, they became more and more in demand, to the point that it was unusual if you didn't wear one. Nowadays there seems to be a bit of a resurgence of using your natural hair, but wigs are still extremely popular. They are not usually considered exactly a rule of Lolita fashion as such. Similarly, makeup is considered the same way. The majority of Lolitas wear makeup with their outfits (sometimes extremely elaborate makeup) but is not usually mentioned as a rule of Lolita.

For this study I was interested to see if opinions on certain rules differed in different communities. Especially since both communities were based in hot climates, I was interested to see if their opinions would match on issues like the importance of wearing a blouse with a JSK, socks/tights to cover their legs, or donning a wig.

The Life of a Lady: "Lifestyle Lolita"

An idea exists within the Lolita community of the "Lifestyle Lolita", an idea that emerged close to its English language origin community EGL on LiveJournal (Lolita Lifestyle 2006). The original lifestyle Lolitas were more than just a wearer of the clothes; they embodied Lolita with their whole life. They acted like proper ladies, listened to classical music, and drank tea, an embodiment of the ideal Victorian woman. A person who aspires to be a Lifestyle Lolita or claims to be one might be referred to as a

Figure 16. An outfit shot and close up of a Sweet-Classic style. Taken at a Lolita event in Tampa. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

"Lifestyler". The definition seems to have shifted somewhat to a more relaxed version, but the idea of building a life around an imagined Lolita identity has continued to live on with those involved with the fashion. And, like Sophia Staite's 2012 thesis suggests, it is a form of class play mixed with nostalgia, to strive to embody a feminine ideal from days past. However, this doesn't appear to be a popular idea in practice, but rather functions like an ideal for some involved in Lolita fashion. And regardless of whether a Lolita considers herself to be a Lifestyle Lolita or not, there is an element of subculture and identity wrapped up in the clothing style, making it more than just fashion to the participants.

Style and Age

As time passes, our tastes change. We might not like the same foods, we might have different hobbies, and our fashion style might change. This is a natural process in Lolita as well. Lolita, like a lot of fashions, changes membership frequently, with some deciding they don't like the fashion anymore, and others newly joining in. And like all

fashion, Lolita goes through trends. Past trends for Lolita that have (mostly) died out include pastel colored wigs that were split down the middle with each side a different color, big chunky platform heels, and “bittersweet” Lolita which was Sweet Lolita done by pairing black with a pastel color, usually pink (One South Florida Lolita during her interview commented jokingly: “we don't talk about black Sweet Lolita, it should not exist and does not exist in my world.”).

When this study was first conceived, I was most interested in the changes of styles that come with age. The popularity of the sugary Sweet substyle seemed to be in decline, and the Classic style seemed to be taking over. On a personal level, I found that my excuse was age; I felt more and more comfortable in the more mature style of Classic rather than the youthful Sweet, to suit my aging experience from a teenager to a woman in her mid-20s. I heard some other Lolitas mention their age as well in terms of feeling too childish in Sweet. “How old is too old to wear Lolita?” questions pop up regularly on Lolita discussions online. However, trends are a constant in fashion, and so I was interested in finding out if aging was an impact on this change of popular styles, or if it was simply the fickle nature of fashion.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Recruitment Methods

Recruitment was done exclusively online for the surveys, and both online and in-person for the interviews. After the survey and interview questions and recruitment script was approved by the IRB, the survey was made on a SurveyMonkey.com account, one for Houston and one for South Florida (see appendixes 1 and 2). The surveys were the same except the location- and community-based questions had the appropriate name on them (Houston/Houston Lolita Community and South Florida/South Florida Lolitas). A post was made on the respective Facebook group from my personal Facebook account, calling for participants over the age of 18, with a link to the online survey. Two and a half weeks later, with participation having completely died out, I made a simple infographic to show what the results of the survey were like so far, comparing the two Facebook groups. That infographic was posted on both communities with a link to the survey and a call for volunteers for Skype audio interviews. The infographic succeeded in drumming up more survey participants, but no interview volunteers came forth. I then sent a private message to those who commented on the infographic post, as well as a few others I saw were active in the community. I was informed that Skype audio was a bit outdated, and conducted the Houston interviews over Facebook audio calls.

For South Florida interview subjects, I both asked them in-person at meet-ups that I attended, or messaged them privately through Facebook. Because of a more personal level of involvement with the South Florida community, there were more South Florida

interview subjects involved. And even though more Houston Lolitas completed the survey, a higher percentage of the total South Florida community took the survey, as opposed to the Houston community As such, the compilation of data might present a skewed perspective in favor of the South Florida Lolitas, particularly in the interviews.

Figure 17. A Sweet Lolita from the South Florida Lolitas group. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

Procedure of Data Collection

The survey data was all collected using SurveyMonkey.com's website. The interview subjects for Houston, as discussed, were interviewed over Facebook audio calls. They were sent digital copies of the consent form, and sent them back with their digital signature on them. Once the call started they were asked if it was alright to start recording the interview with an audio recorder and the interview was conducted, loosely following the interview script. The South Florida Lolitas interview participants, after they

had casually agreed to be interviewed, set up a public meeting place and time to meet over Facebook messages. The meeting places were coffee shops or restaurants. At the time of the meeting the interview subject would be presented with the consent form, and once signed the same interview process would take place. After these interviews the audio recordings were transcribed.

Data Analysis

The survey data was analyzed as separate Houston and South Florida data sets, giving counts and percentages for the multiple choice answers. For the write-in answers, including how long they had been interested in the fashion, how long they had actually been engaged in wearing the clothing, how long they had been a part of their regional Lolita Facebook group, and how old they were, I calculated the averages. From two questions ("Which substyle(s) of Lolita do you currently prefer?" And "Has your preference changed since you were first interested? If so, which style(s) did you use to prefer?") I calculated which styles had fallen out of favor and which were only now popular for the subjects. After these basic calculations, the data from each survey was also combined to create an overall look at Lolita fashion in the United States.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Survey Results

The survey found that altogether the participants tend to be young adults and predominately female. Of those surveyed, 88% self-identified as female, with only 2% identifying as male. Their ages ranged from 18 to 34 (there are members under the age of 18, but they were not surveyed). The average age is 24.2 for those over 18. Slightly over half claim their ethnicity to be White, with the next largest demographic being Hispanic at 24%, then Asian/Pacific Islander at 10%, and Black/African American at 8%. They are primarily single, never married (69%), with the mass majority of them having no children (94%). Because many of them are still young and college-aged, it is hard to calculate education level, but 41% claimed they had "Some college" and 29% claimed to have a Bachelor's degree. Along these lines, 37% selected "Student" as their occupation.

The results of the survey did show some differences in the attitudes between the two regional communities, the Houston Lolita Community and the South Florida Lolitas, as well as highlighted some of their similarities. The basic demographic information given above is based on the data from both surveys put together. If taken separately, we can see that the South Florida Lolitas are a slightly "older" group in most ways. They were, on average, interested in Lolita fashion 1.1 years longer, and had been wearing the fashion an average of 0.4 years longer. They had been in the Facebook group, on average, 0.9 years longer, and the difference between their average ages is 2 years (Houston's

average age was 23.4, and South Florida's was 25.4). There was also a slightly higher percentage of participants who were married (28% vs. 19%) and had children (11% vs. 3%) in South Florida than in Houston.

The one demographic that there is the most difference in is the ethic makeup of the participants. The Houston group was surveyed as being mostly White (61%), with Hispanic (19%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (13%) being the minorities. In South Florida, it was an even split between White and Hispanic (each 33% of those surveyed), with Black/African American (22%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (6%) as the minorities.

Those who are engaged with Lolita fashion have varying levels of interest. A few wear the style every day, while others may only wear it to Lolita meet-ups. And there is a big difference between engaging with Lolita fashion and its communities online, and actually wearing the fashion. Based on the total survey data collected for this study, there is an average of 2.3 years in between the time a Lolita becomes interested in the fashion to when they actually begin to wear it. And it's important to remember that the local community is only one avenue for discussion for Lolitas, with many generic and specific-interest groups available online. So even when they do start wearing it, some Lolitas spend a lot more time looking at Lolita blogs and shopping than they do actually wearing the fashion. When asked how often they participated in their respective online regional groups, Houston Lolita Community and South Florida Lolitas, only 8% said it was daily. 22% said they engaged online with their community weekly, 25% said it was monthly, and 39% actually said they rarely engage with the community at all. In comparison, when asked how often they involved themselves with in-person things with the community, like meet-ups, none of them claimed it was on a daily or weekly basis. Instead, 39% said

Figure 18. A religious themed outfit. Outfits like this are a part of the Classic substyle. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

it was on a monthly basis, and 49% said they rarely involved themselves with offline events for the community. This follows a trend easily observed in the groups — that planned meet-ups for these regional groups hover around the once-a-month variety.

The level of participation with their geographic community varies between these two Lolita groups. Houston engaged with the local community less. When asked how often they engage with their regional Facebook group (Houston Lolita Community or South Florida Lolitas), the largest percentage of Houston Lolitas selected the "Rarely" option (45%), compared to South Florida where the largest percentage selected the "Weekly" option (44%). Similarly, when asked how often they engaged in-person with their local Lolita community, 61% of Houston survey answerers choose "Rarely", while 61% of South Florida respondents picked "Monthly". And with these differences in their relationships with the communities, the difference in what things they value rather expectantly fall along community contribution. South Florida values participation much more than Houston in all three categories listed on the survey: online involvement (44% vs. 15%), involvement at in-

person events (72% vs. 33%), and hosting meet-ups (50% vs. 30%). Houston valued the other listed options more than South Florida. They valued the length of involvement with Lolita in general a little higher, with 30% valuing it compared to the 23% of South Florida respondents. And even though status as a moderator was not a very popular option for things they admired in other Lolitas, Houston did value it a slight bit more — 12% verses the 6% of South Florida. The option Houston admired the most over South Florida was the ability of a Lolita to follow the rules/guidelines of the Lolita silhouette. 64% of Houston Lolitas surveyed admired it in others, while 44% of South Florida Lolitas did.

In terms of similarities between the two, they were more similar than they were different. The popular substyles followed similar percentages, with Classic being the favorite, followed by Gothic, and then Sweet as the least popular of the three currently. When asked if there was anything they thought might make them stop wearing Lolita fashion, the most popular answer was obvious — that they might quit because their fashion tastes change. The two other most popular choices for both groups for reasons why they might become uninterested in Lolita was aging and a change in their financial situation. From the answers provided, they both claimed the smallest impact would be a change in jobs, and the second most doubtful reason for quitting Lolita would be if the fashion itself were to become less popular overall. Both groups had a high percentage of Lolitas that claim they offer advice to other people interested in Lolita fashion (88% for Houston, 78% for South Florida), and in both communities they would be more likely to give advice online than in person.

Figure 19. Purposely wearing the same dress is known as “twinning”. The matching aspect beyond the dress varies. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

Although Lolita is supposedly a pure fashion style all about the clothes, with no ideology like Punk or Goth, Lolitas see their commitment to Lolita fashion as more than just clothing on the whole. For the most part they see themselves dedicated to Lolita in a way more than just clothes. With a “Select all that apply” answer format to the question

"What is Lolita to you?", the large majority of both groups selected "Hobby" (79% Houston, 94% South Florida). And interestingly, 33% of Houston respondents and 28% of South Florida ones selected the "Lifestyle" answer. By far and away the biggest similarity was that every single person who completed the survey selected that they admired "creativity in outfits" of other Lolitas.

Figure 20. A Gothic Lolita coordinate at a Lolita event in Tampa. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

The results from the survey about the importance of certain items when wearing Lolita are summed up in Figure 21. The Houston Lolitas felt the items were more important overall, except curiously makeup, which was the only "rule" South Florida felt more strongly about.

As covered in the Introduction, Lolitas tend to be hostile to an association with cosplay and other groups, but there is undoubtedly a link between the spread of Lolita fashion and overseas fan communities of Japanese anime. When asked how they found out about Lolita fashion, a common answer is that is was through Japanese anime

and its fan conventions in their area. Lolita fashion clothing (in both completely accurate forms and styles inspired by it) are included in some anime character styles, for obvious

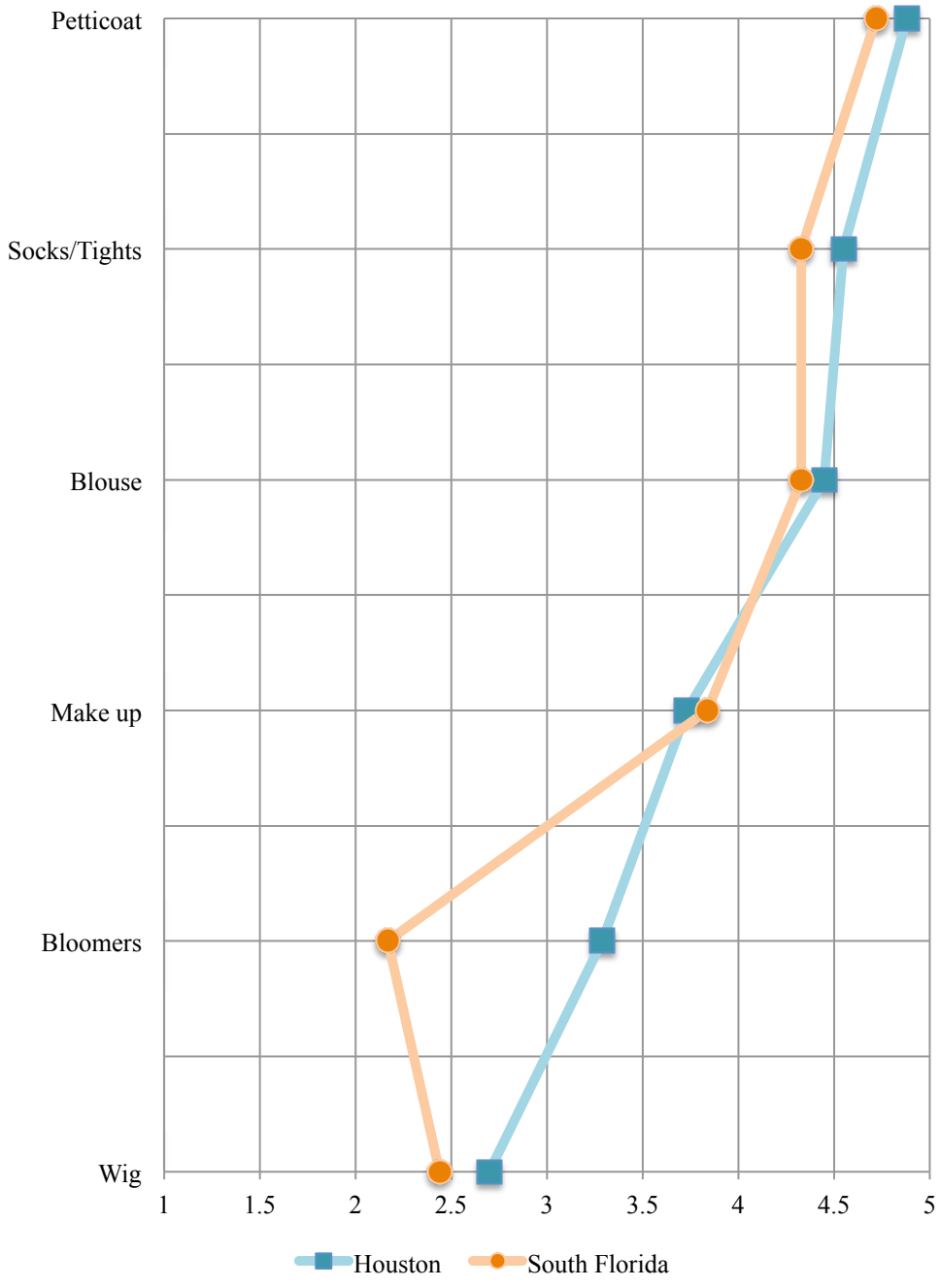

Figure 21. A Likert scale model of the importance of certain items to Lolitas. 5 is the "Very Important" option, 3 is "Neutral" and 1 is "Not Important."

reasons. These characters are stylistically interesting, as opposed to a character with average clothing. Although not about anime in particular, one survey question for this study asked how they had first come across Lolita. 65% of those surveyed were introduced through some sort of Japanese culture aspect (including anime as well as travel, music, or so on), 21% discovered it through some aspect of fashion culture instead, and a mere 6% were introduced through a friend.

Interviews and Observations

And like the survey results, in the interviews creativity was something that was expressed as an important aspect to their involvement in Lolita, or something they valued seeing in others. And while a few Lolitas sew their own clothing and use that as their creative outlet, the majority does not. “I have no arts and crafts to me at all. I tried sewing when I first got into Lolita, I bought a sewing machine, I was terrible at it” (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a Houston Lolita by author. December). From the interview responses and observations, most seem to enjoy the process of curating the outfit, with perhaps a simple handcrafted accessory. But the putting together of an outfit in a creative way is definitely the most rewarding for them. “I feel like, you know, when you just want to stand in the mirror and admire yourself? Like, you're really proud, of — you, you're like a construction worker, you know. You're putting together a cohesive outfit and you're taking like, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, doing so, and you just look at yourself and admire yourself, and you feel, accomplished, you feel empowered, you feel beautiful, you feel like, feminine” (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December). Part of that construction is what flatters the body. Several interview subjects

brought up a color or a style being flattering or not flattering on their body type or skin tone, and to have a successful coordination it was important for it to look good on the particular person. Participation at meet-ups also confirmed this idea as a popular one, that some cuts of dresses, dresses, colors, or accessories were more suitable to some Lolitas than others.

This emphasis on the creative aspect appears to be a major difference between Lolita in Japan and in the United States. As discussed in the Introduction, Lolita in Japan functions as a subversive rebellion. In "Cuties in Japan," Sharon Kinsella describes general cute fashion in Japan as "a kind of rebellion or refusal to cooperate with the established social values and realities. It was a demure, indolent little rebellion rather than a conscious, aggressive and sexually provocative rebellion of the sort that has been typical of western youth cultures" (1995, 243). So the question then becomes, why would Lolita even appeal to Westerners at all? The cultural idea of becoming an adult in the West includes thoughts of freedom from being told what to do, and autonomy over one's own life. So if childhood means freedom in Japan, while adulthood means freedom in the West, then the appeal of extending a selfish childhood doesn't apply for Western Lolitas. A thesis out of Australia suggests that the motivation is in part nostalgia for a time period of wealthy high class women who held dainty tea parties and leisurely socialized (Staite 2012). And in fact, one of the interview subjects for this study stated that part of why she likes Lolita is that she tends to like anything Victorian-esque, or things with "floofy-floofy frills" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December). Kinsella offers a reason in her discussion about Japan:

> [T]he general belief that childhood is 'another world', in some ways an ideal world, has been the dominant perception of childhood throughout the developed

> world for most of the twentieth century. Early European criticism of the spiritual poverty of modern society, which developed in response to industrialisation and urbanisation, led to a romantic reevaluation of pre-industrial society. For the first time, past and more primitive lives in rural communities and in childhood were described as a period of innocence, simplicity and spiritual unity which had been ruptured and destroyed by the corrupting and alienating forces of modern social relations and cities (1995, 241).

And she calls out Disney as being a response for this yearning for pre-industrial innocence, like the "culture of cute" and cute fashion in Japan is a response for longing for childhood freedom.

> [W]hereas Disney cute was based more on a sentimental journey back into an idealised rural society populated with happy little animals and rural characters taken from folk stories, Japanese cute fashion became more concerned with a sentimental journey back into an idealised childhood. As Disney romanticised nature in relation to industrial society, so Japanese cuteness romanticised childhood in relation to adulthood (1995, 241).

And although Lolita's style influence is not exactly from the pre-industrial era, Feldman-Barrett, who wrote about neo-Victorian fashions in the modern subcultures of Goth, Lolita, and Steampunk, says that by taking something ordinary from another time, it makes it extraordinary for these youth culture groups and marks their difference from their contemporary society. "In their use of nineteenth-century motifs, they also rebel against aspects of the period that are found distasteful in today's world" (2013, 75). So I would argue that the motivations for Lolita might fall along the same lines. Instead of a subversive act against dreaded adulthood, Lolita in the West fulfills the function of a rebellion against all that is seen as wrong about modern society.

Of course Lolitas in general do not see things this way, and offer several other personal motivations for participating with the fashion. Several of the interview subjects made it clear that Lolita gave them confidence when they wore it, more so than other clothes. However, the thing unanimously agreed upon in both the surveys and interviews

was the importance of creativity with the fashion, something not mentioned or relegated to a side note in studies of Japanese Lolitas, making it the other marked difference from Japan besides motivation. Every single survey respondent in this study checked the box to say they admired creativity in other's outfits, and almost every interview subject mentioned how they either gathered inspiration from other Lolita's creative outfits, or the reason they liked Lolita is that it served as a creative outlet. "When I wear it I feel creative. Like, I really enjoy putting coordinates together, and since I don't really have any artistic talents as far as drawing or writing music, this is definitely an artistic outlet for me. So, I feel very creative when I wear Lolita" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December). "But the fun thing for me, is to see people get really creative. Like, and to see what people do with the same thing. Like I'm *all about* — I think it's so cool, when people like, wear the dress, in like four different styles. Like, how cool is that? So cool" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December). And in fact, wearing the same dress for Lolitas is definitely not an embarrassing *faux pas* like it might be at a party. It is usually something to be excited about, that you have something in common but put your own style on it. There is even a term for purposefully wearing the same dress, "twinning". When a Lolita "twins" with another Lolita they arrange it beforehand, and wear the same dress. The accessories can be exactly the same but are usually a personal touch on the ensemble, and twinning is seen as a fun activity.

Two interview subjects added other reasons on top of creativity that they liked about Lolita, one on the hobby-like quality and the other on the social aspect. "I love how you can be really creative with your outfits, and, I just really enjoy wearing the fashion,

it's something different. Something to do, something to be excited about" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December). "I mean the reason I joined the community down here is, I moved down here and I didn't know anyone. And I stumbled across someone at a convention who saw that I was *trying* to wear Lolita. And they were like 'oh you should join the South Florida Lolitas!' Like, I don't have any friends, I don't know anyone, this would be a good avenue to meet people and explore the fashion more. So, I mean, it's my social outlet, I guess" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December).

A popular answer to why they like Lolita that is commonly thrown in is simply that it's cute, or they just like the aesthetic. But as stated at in a previous quotation from an interview, some do seem to involve themselves with it as a point of youthful rebellion. But interestingly, most interview subjects had negative associations with the attention a rebellious alternative fashion might bring. Two (one from Houston, one from South Florida) stated that Lolita made them more aware of physical safety issues as a woman who stood out, and most were extremely frustrated when they drew so much attention. At the end of the interviews, the subjects were asked if they had anything to add about Lolita that wasn't covered. Three of them used that time to say they wish people knew what it was; one of them explicitly stated that it was because they didn't want to explain it all the time, and the other two implying the same thing. Maybe it's annoying if your rebellion goes unnoticed in a sea of "what *is* it?" questions. But several Lolitas talked about a more "toned-down" style becoming increasingly popular, either in regards to Lolita fashion as a whole or themselves personally. The "toned-down" style is in contrast to the roughly 2010 era of OTT Sweet that made Lolita the focus of many a titillating journalist or

intrigued researcher. When asked how she first got into the fashion, one interview subject recalled just how out there it was from other things she had seen: “I remember seeing when I was younger, one of those stereotypic pictures that you see on Google of a Lolita girl, just *completely* decked out, like 2008 Sweet Lolita, just like, to the nines, with stuff

Figure 22. Two friends have purposely worn a dress with the same print. This is called “twinning”. The matching set of necklaces they made themselves. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

in her hair, almost like Decora-esque. And I was like, what the fuck is that? And I was judging real hard, I really was, and then I suddenly saw it again one day, in a different light, more toned down, and elegant, instead of just crazy clown looking girl, and I wanted to look more into it" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December).

One interviewee brought up practical reasons for the transition from OTT Sweet to more casual styles, along with not liking the attention that such a loud outfit would bring: "Like before it was really exhausting, your head would be heavy, you're sweating even if it's cold out because you have so many layers on, and with this more toned down style, it's a little bit more natural as well. Like, it feels, more like less people are looking I guess. So I can still wear the fashion and instead of people going like 'are you wearing a costume?', people will come say, 'I really like your dress', you know, 'you look so pretty', whatever, so the comments change, depending on how, over the top you are. And so to have this more calmed down version, less people want to talk to you,

Figure 23. An outfit from the Classic substyle. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

which is great to me, but I still get that comfort of, wearing the fashion" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a Houston Lolita by author. December). An interview subject who says her style changed from Sweet to a blend of Sweet and Classic said this about the change: "I just feel like, wearing certain prints out, are better for me, in terms of not being, judged by society and, not to say I prefer to get complimented, but I'd prefer to get compliments than just kind of like, the evil eye every time I pass by them. 'Cause whether somebody admits it or not, you know people are like 'oh I don't care what people think', everybody cares what other people think, and it's uncomfortable going out when you feel like, you hear somebody *laughing* and you think they're laughing at you. Nobody wants that. So, I've changed my style to make sure it was kind of normy [normal people] friendly" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December).

The comments made towards Lolitas seem to really frustrate them sometimes. One interview subject joked about reversing the situation: "Actually my friend and I were talking about this the other day, that, um, we should dress up like crazy over the top, and then go out, and stop normal looking people, and be like 'what *are* you? Are you a secretary? You *totally* have the secretary look. I have a friend who's a secretary, and you look *exactly* like her. Oh my god, do you have an Instagram, 'cause your secretary look is *amazing.* Ok. Ok, ok, I have to go now, can I get a picture with you? Ok, ok, I have to go, though, bye.' And then like go up to a whole bunch of people and do that. 'Oh my god, are you like, a businessman?' or like 'what *are* you?' Anyway, because it's what you hear, all the time" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December). But along that vein, it's not like Lolitas don't recognize their strangeness to

the general public. They are in fact quite aware of it, and in response to asking how she thought other people (non-Lolitas) saw her, she replied laughing, “They probably think I look like a clown. Or like Little Bo Peep lost her sheep or something. I mean I try not to let those things get to me, but, if I saw myself, not knowing myself, I'd be like, 'What is that fat girl doing in that giant dress?’” (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December).

But what about when Lolitas are not actually wearing Lolita — what do they wear? For those that I’ve seen, it tends to run the gamut. But largely they just simply don’t put as much effort into their normal clothing as they do Lolita, especially because Lolita is an elaborate style. Many claim to be “T-shirt and jeans” kinds of people when they are not wearing Lolita, and that one of the reasons they like Lolita in the first place is it allows a feminine extravagance to exist apart from their plain daily routine. “You know I just love the kind of, girliness aesthetic to it. For me I just wear like pants every single day, I don't really do my hair or makeup, I'm pretty lazy when it comes to stuff like that. But when you get to wear Lolita it's a chance to kinda doll yourself up, and, it's just so, so beautiful, from the prints to the hair and the makeup, and it's like, it's just a major confidence boost when you wear it” (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a Houston Lolita by author. December).

And in regards to the rules/guidelines, the strictness in which they are taken seems to vary. Some in the interviews said they were hard and fast rules, while most allowed for a bit of a grey area. Especially after someone was not new to the fashion and had a handle on what Lolita looked like, flexibility with the rules is much more forgiven. One interview subject attributed the origin to a time when Lolita had less options, and as such

rules have morphed into guidelines with the expanded audience and repertoire of Lolita clothing: “I personally, prefer more the guidelines verses like a, specific rule? Just because, the fashion has changed so much. So when these rules were made, every single Lolita dress had the same kind of style, right, um, a smaller waist, and it had enough fabric to create that poofy, sort of cupcake shape. And, you know, they only like had really one kind of look going on. But as the years have changed, we've created so many different shapes of JSKs and OPs and so on, that, you can't follow the specific aesthetic anymore. And, since so many people around the world are wearing it, not only in Japan, we have to kind of adapt, not only for safety reasons, but, for just comfortable. So here, let's say Houston specifically, uh in the summer it gets close to the 100s, and then plus the humidity, it's unbearable, so, let's say if we wanted to have something outdoors — which does not happen — but even just walking to wherever you're going, you won't — a lot of those people won't wear blouses at all anymore, because it's just, not, uh, 100% needed. Like I think the community understands that it is *hot*, and, if that makes people more comfortable and it's safer for you because you're not having so many layers on. Then that's ok” (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a Houston Lolita by author. December).

So following the rules is a bit of a stricter subject for those just starting with the fashion. The ability to take and use advice and constructive criticism well is also more important for people new to the fashion. In fact, a couple of Lolitas who were interviewed thought it was a major sign of disrespect to all Lolitas when someone received advice about how to wear Lolita properly and completely ignored it. “If they know they're doing something wrong, and ignoring it, then….that's just *rude*, to the entire

Lolita community, because we are trying to help you, like, listen to us! Just, we are speaking words, we are wasting our breath on you. At least pretend that you care. Make an effort" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December).

Several Lolitas also commented without being prompted about the importance of an accepting community in their lives. For some, this was the local community, while with others, accepting friends. "I have a lot of friends that are into Lolita fashion, so it just kind of helps build up that kind of, um, that sense of community, that makes me want to stay in it, and it's a lot more fun" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a Houston Lolita by author. December).

When asked about Lifestyle Lolita, the interview subjects had much the same to say: it's just not practical. Some thought the idea of Lifestyle Lolita was popular, but the actual practice of it as close to non-existent for practicality purposes. "I think the idea of it is popular, where girls who are really interested in Lolita fashion *want* that kind of lifestyle, but it's not very practical, so I don't think it's like people who actually indulge in it is actually super popular. You know, it kinda - it depends on what your situation is, most people either can't afford it or they're not in a position were they can actually wear it, like as a lifestyle. So, yeah. I think it's more like the idealization is popular" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a Houston Lolita by author. December). Another Lolita treated the idea itself with scorn "I think it's allowing a fashion to dictate who you are? Instead of you making the fashion your own. Um, so it wouldn't be for me, personally. But I guess if you don't have an identity of your own, then it'd be perfect for you" (Anonymous. 2016. Interview with a South Florida Lolita by author. December).

One interviewed subject talked about implementing certain things into her life that were considered Lifestyle Lolita activities, but did not think of herself as a Lifestyle Lolita because she feels like she isn't as dedicated as the term would imply. And another interview subject said that she already did a lot of the activities *before* she became interested in Lolita fashion at all, but wearing the fashion everyday was not something she wanted to do.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In terms of the differences between the two United States Lolita communities studied, the primary difference was regarding community involvement. South Florida was involved more frequently in their Lolita community, and valued community involvement more. Which is rather unsurprising because they are a smaller group. Otherwise, the differences were slight, suggesting that regional communities do not differ all that greatly. As for the larger picture of looking at American Lolitas in general, the surprise was that Lolita fashion served as a creative outlet for many of the participants. In spite of the rules that often characterize Lolita as a strict sort of almost uniform, creativity in the outfits is a source of major admiration. And in a way, perhaps the strictness of the fashion with its rules facilitates creative touches more in the subtle details. This would match Roland Barthes' ideas about *dress* and

Figure 24. Korean Lolita designer Haenuli at a Lolita event in Tampa, Florida. Her dress, tights, and headwear are all her own brand's products. (Photo by: Bayli Berry)

dressing. For Barthes, *dress* is "an institutional, fundamentally social, reality, which, independent of the individual, is like the systematic, normative reserve from which the individual draws their own clothing." While *dressing* is the "act of 'getting dressed', in which the individual actualizes on their body the general inscription of dress" (Barthes 2004, 8). For Lolita, *dress* are the rules of the fashion, and *dressing* are the creative aspects to it. Barthes also comments that things that are a part of *dressing* may become a part of *dress* once it is incorporated in the social conscience of the group. Lolita, like other fashion, does this by taking those creative notations of one person and replicating it until it becomes accepted and normal. For example, the blouse used to be the defining item to be worn under the JSK, and other items like boleros and cardigans went on top. Now, it is accepted practice to skip the blouse and simply wear the bolero/cardigan on top, deployed in the same shoulder covering function that was once served by the blouse alone.

As for the idea that aging plays a role deciding which substyle to wear for Lolitas, the evidence was simply not there. While through the survey responses we saw that 20% of participants had moved away from the Sweet style in their Lolita career, a more impressive 43% had moved towards Classic since first starting with Lolita fashion. The discrepancy between the numbers shows that it is just that Classic has become more popular overall, rather than stealing all the Sweet Lolitas from their style. The interviews support this as well, with most of the interview subjects talking about either a Sweet/Classic blend becoming popular, or just toning down the look in general. This more casual, less OTT and outrageous style that has become more popular fits more with the Classic substyle, and is most likely a trend change, similar to how OTT Sweet Lolita

became the dominant and popular style in the past. The interviews also suggested that this "toned down" look had the advantage of being more physically comfortable to wear, as well as drawing less negative attention from passersby.

For the "Lifestyle Lolita," it became readily apparent that this was merely an ideal rather than a reality for Lolitas. The interview subjects almost universally called it out as being impractical, although opinions on the validity of having a lifestyle centered around Lolita varied. Some interview subjects disparaged the idea, while others looked at it as an aspiration. There was also a difference in how the interview subject defined the idea of a Lifestyle Lolita. Some included the original notion of "being a proper lady", but the most important aspect to them seemed to be wearing Lolita fashion everyday (which was referred to as the impractical part). The second most popularly mentioned part of a Lifestyle Lolita was decorating, personal items and interior decorating, to have a feminine and romantic look to things surrounding you.

The difficulties involved with this research include small sample size and bias. Because of the small amount of Lolitas in general, finding participants happens in extremely small numbers. And because in this particular study I was based out of South Florida, there was no in-person recruiting for Houston interview subject. And although the total number of Houston survey subjects was larger, the South Florida Lolitas took the survey in a higher percentage of the total population of the Facebook group. Because of this, the information gathered might be more accurate of a look at the South Florida Lolitas than the Houston Lolita Community. And as such, the comparison between the two might be faulty. Besides just between the two groups, there is obvious bias from me, the researcher, toward Lolita fashion in general, as a long-time participant in the fashion.

However, as the old debate goes, perhaps an emic approach is more robust even if it is more biased.

For future research on this topic, a study comparing several different Lolita groups in Japan with several different Lolita groups in the US would be the next logical step to see just how much of an impact culture has on such a small community. It would ideally be conducted with the same survey in both English and Japanese for a more direct comparison. Additionally, exploring ideas of youth for each culture would be beneficial because, as mentioned before, it seems to produce different motivations for wearing Lolita fashion in each culture. Along this vein, if Japanese Lolitas are participating in a subversive rebellion, what might be the psychological implications American Lolitas participating in the same fashion? Beyond using it as a creative outlet, the mere fact that it enjoys some popularity in the US shows there is some motivation for why it is attractive to its American participants.

It would also be very interesting for a future research project to look into the implications of sexuality for the fashion. What does it say about our culture in the US that a fashion that covers the body quite modestly and has childish elements to it is seen as somehow sexually motivated? The vast majority of the participants involved with Lolita fashion violently reject any suggestion of sexualization. In fact, some claim specifically that they like Lolita fashion because it is a way to be feminine while avoiding sexuality. Lolita fashion in the United States, therefore, might actually serve an anti-sexuality function for American Lolitas. More research is definitely needed in this case.

Other methodology that might be utilized includes comparing a hot climate with a cold climate, and taking group interviews vs. individual ones. Although comparing two

groups in similar climates was suitable for this research paper, future research might be done to see if the importance of wearing hot items like blouses, wigs, and bloomers differs between a relatively hot climate and a relatively cold one when physical discomfort factors are on more extreme ends. And by taking group interviews and individual ones, there is a potential to see what is expected of them (in a group setting) and what they more personally believe (in a one-on-one interview) about issues regarding Lolita fashion.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A. IRB Approval Letter

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research
777 Glades Rd.
Boca Raton, FL 33431
Tel: 561.297.1383
fau.edu/research/researchint

Charles Dukes, Ed.D., Chair

DATE:	November 21, 2016
TO:	Susan Love Brown, Ph.D
FROM:	Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB
IRBNET ID #:	952523-2
PROTOCOL TITLE:	[952523-2] Ethnographic Comparison of the Lolita Fashion Groups of Houston and South Florida
PROJECT TYPE:	*New Project*
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	November 21, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE:	November 21, 2017
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Expedited review category # *B7*

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this research study. The Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB has APPROVED your *[enter project type]*. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

- This study is approved for a maximum of *60* participants.
- It is important that you use the approved, stamped consent documents or procedures included with this letter:
  - Protocol - Appendix 1a (stamped)
  - Questionnaire/Survey - Online survey with consent attached - Houston (stamped)
  - Questionnaire/Survey - Online survey with consent attached - South Florida (stamped)
  - Questionnaire/Survey - Interview Questions (stamped)
  - Consent Form - Photograph Consent Form (stamped)
  - Consent Form - Interview Consent Form (stamped)
  - Other - Facebook script for soliciting volunteers (stamped)
- ****Please note that any revision to previously approved materials or procedures, including modifications to numbers of subjects, must be approved by the IRB before it is initiated.** Please use the amendment form to request IRB approval of a proposed revision.

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- All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All regulatory and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed, if applicable.
- Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.
- Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.
- **This approval is valid for one year.** A Continuing Review form will be required prior to the expiration date if this project will continue beyond one year.

If you have any questions or comments about this correspondence, please contact Ximena Levy at:

Institutional Review Board
Research Integrity/Division of Research
Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, FL 33431
Phone: 561.297.1383
researchintegrity@fau.edu

* Please include your protocol number and title in all correspondence with this office.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within our records.

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Appendix B. IRB Amendment Approval

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research
777 Glades Rd.
Boca Raton, FL 33431
Tel: 561.297.1383
fau.edu/research/researchint

Charles Dukes, Ed.D., Chair

DATE:	March 29, 2017
TO:	Susan Love Brown, Ph.D
FROM:	Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB
PROTOCOL #:	952523-3
PROTOCOL TITLE:	[952523-3] Ethnographic Comparison of the Lolita Fashion Groups of Houston and South Florida
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Amendment/Modification
ACTION:	APPROVED
EFFECTIVE DATE:	March 29, 2017

Thank you for your submission of Amendment materials for this research protocol. The Florida Atlantic University IRB has approved your request to modify your protocol as outlined below:

- ***Increase number of participants from 60 to 100***

Please use the stamped, revised (consents, instruments, etc.) that accompany this approval letter.

- Protocol (stamped)

If you have any questions or comments about this correspondence, please contact Danae Montgomery at:

Institutional Review Board
Research Integrity/Division of Research
Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, FL 33431
Phone: 561.297.1383
researchintegrity@fau.edu

* Please include your protocol number and title in all correspondence with this office.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within our records.

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Appendix C. South Florida Survey Questions

1. Do you currently live in the South Florida area? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. Yes
    b. I used to live there
    c. I am planning to move there
    d. Some of my family members live there
    e. Other (_____)
    f. Prefer not to answer
2. How did you first find out about Lolita fashion? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. Some aspect of Japanese specific culture (anime, travel, visual kei, etc)
    b. Some aspect of general fashion culture (magazine, blog, website, etc)
    c. A friend
    d. Other (_____)
    e. Prefer not to answer
3. How long have you been actively interested in Lolita fashion?
    a. _____
4. Which substyle(s) of Lolita fashion do you currently prefer? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Sweet
    b. Gothic
    c. Classic
    d. Other (_____)
    e. Prefer not to answer
5. Has your preference changed since you were first interested? If so, which style(s) did you use to prefer? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Sweet
    b. Gothic
    c. Classic
    d. Other (_____)
    e. Preference did not change
    f. Prefer not to answer
6. Do you think you will ever stop wearing/being interested in Lolita? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Maybe when I get older
    b. Maybe if my fashion tastes change
    c. Maybe if I change jobs
    d. Maybe if I start a family
    e. Maybe if I have bad experiences with it
    f. Maybe if my financial situation changes
    g. Maybe if it becomes less popular
    h. No
    i. Prefer not to answer
7. Do you currently wear Lolita clothing? If yes, answer the following. If not, skip to question 10.
    a. Yes

b. No

8. When do you wear Lolita clothing? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. Everyday
    b. Occasionally
    c. Rarely or only for special occasions
    d. Only for lolita-related events (meet-ups, conventions, etc)
    e. Prefer not to answer
9. How long have you been wearing it?
    a. _____
10. What is Lolita to you? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Clothing
    b. Costume
    c. Interest
    d. Hobby
    e. Lifestyle
    f. Prefer not to answer
11. How did you find out about the South Florida EGL Facebook community? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. EGL or another large lolita community
    b. A friend
    c. Facebook search
    d. Google or other search engine
    e. Prefer not to answer
12. How long have you been involved with the South Florida EGL Facebook community?
    a. _____
13. How often do you engage with the South Florida EGL Facebook group online? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. Daily
    b. Weekly
    c. Monthly
    d. Rarely
    e. Prefer not to answer
14. How often do you participate in-person with the South Florida EGL Facebook community (ex: going to meet ups)? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. Daily
    b. Weekly
    c. Monthly
    d. Rarely
    e. Prefer not to answer
15. Do you ever give advice to other people interested in Lolita fashion? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. Yes, but only online
    b. Yes, but only in person
    c. Yes, online and in person
    d. No

e. Prefer not to answer

16. What kind of things do you admire in a person who wears Lolita? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Their creativity in outfits
    b. Their ability to follow the Lolita silhouette and rules
    c. Their status as a moderator in an online community
    d. Their high level of involvement in an online community
    e. Their high level of involvement at in-person community events
    f. Their hosting of meet ups
    g. Their length of involvement with Lolita fashion
    h. Other (_____)
    i. Prefer not to answer
17. When wearing Lolita fashion, how important do you believe it is to wear…. (Please select the closest answers)
    a. Socks or tights?
        i. Not important
        ii. Not too important
        iii. Neutral
        iv. A little important
        v. Important
        vi. Prefer not to answer
    b. A blouse under a jumperskirt (JSK)?
        i. Not important
        ii. Not too important
        iii. Neutral
        iv. A little important
        v. Important
        vi. Prefer not to answer
    c. A petticoat?
        i. Not important
        ii. Not too important
        iii. Neutral
        iv. A little important
        v. Important
        vi. Prefer not to answer
    d. Bloomers or modesty shorts?
        i. Not important
        ii. Not too important
        iii. Neutral
        iv. A little important
        v. Important
        vi. Prefer not to answer
    e. A wig?
        i. Not important
        ii. Not too important
        iii. Neutral

iv. A little important
v. Important
vi. Prefer not to answer

f. Make up?
i. Not important
ii. Not too important
iii. Neutral
iv. A little important
v. Important
vi. Prefer not to answer

18. What is your age?
    a. _____
19. Which gender do you identify with? (Please select one)
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Other (_____)
    d. Prefer not to answer
20. Which ethnicity describes you? (Please select one)
    a. White
    b. Hispanic / Latino
    c. Black /African American
    d. Native American / American Indian
    e. Asian / Pacific Islander
    f. Other (_____)
    g. Prefer not to answer
21. What is your marital status? (Please select one)
    a. Single, never married
    b. Married
    c. Divorced
    d. Widowed
    e. Prefer not to answer
22. Do you have any children? (Please select one)
    a. Yes, one child
    b. Yes, more than one child
    c. No
    d. Prefer not to answer
23. What is the highest level of school or degree you have completed? (Please select one)
    a. Some high school
    b. High school diploma or equivalent
    c. Some college
    d. Associate degree
    e. Bachelor's degree
    f. Master's degree
    g. Doctorate degree
    h. Prefer not to answer

24. What best describes your occupation? (Please select one)
    a. Student
    b. Homemaker
    c. Self-Employed
    d. Employed
    e. Unemployed, looking for work
    f. Unemployed, not looking for work
    g. Retired
    h. Unable to work
    i. Prefer not to answer
25. What is your total annual household income? (Please select one)
    a. Less than $20,000
    b. $20,000 - $30,000
    c. $30,000 - $40,000
    d. $40,000 - $50,000
    e. $50,000 - $60,000
    f. $60,000 - $70,000
    g. $70,000 - $80,000
    h. $80,000 - $90,000
    i. $90,000 - $100,000
    j. More than $100,000
    k. Prefer not to answer

Appendix D. Houston Survey Questions

1. Do you currently live in the Greater Houston area? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. Yes
    b. I used to live there
    c. I am planning to move there
    d. Some of my family members live there
    e. Other (_____)
    f. Prefer not to answer
2. How did you first find out about Lolita fashion? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. Some aspect of Japanese specific culture (anime, travel, visual kei, etc)
    b. Some aspect of general fashion culture (magazine, blog, website, etc)
    c. A friend
    d. Other (_____)
    e. Prefer not to answer
3. How long have you been actively interested in Lolita fashion?
    a. _____
4. Which substyle(s) of Lolita fashion do you currently prefer? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Sweet
    b. Gothic
    c. Classic
    d. Other (_____)
    e. Prefer not to answer
5. Has your preference changed since you were first interested? If so, which style(s) did you use to prefer? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Sweet
    b. Gothic
    c. Classic
    d. Other (_____)
    e. Preference did not change
    f. Prefer not to answer
6. Do you think you will ever stop wearing/being interested in Lolita? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Maybe when I get older
    b. Maybe if my fashion tastes change
    c. Maybe if I change jobs
    d. Maybe if I start a family
    e. Maybe if I have bad experiences with it
    f. Maybe if my financial situation changes
    g. Maybe if it becomes less popular
    h. No
    i. Prefer not to answer
7. Do you currently wear Lolita clothing? If yes, answer the following. If not, skip to question 10.

a. Yes
b. No

8. When do you wear Lolita clothing? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. Everyday
    b. Occasionally
    c. Rarely or only for special occasions
    d. Only for lolita-related events (meet-ups, conventions, etc)
    e. Prefer not to answer
9. How long have you been wearing it?
    a. _____
10. What is Lolita to you? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Clothing
    b. Costume
    c. Interest
    d. Hobby
    e. Lifestyle
    f. Prefer not to answer
11. How did you find out about the Houston Lolita Community Facebook community? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. EGL or another large lolita community
    b. A friend
    c. Facebook search
    d. Google or other search engine
    e. Prefer not to answer
12. How long have you been involved with the Houston Lolita Community Facebook community?
    a. _____
13. How often do you engage with the Houston Lolita Community Facebook group online? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. Daily
    b. Weekly
    c. Monthly
    d. Rarely
    e. Prefer not to answer
14. How often do you participate in-person with the Houston Lolita Community Facebook community (ex: going to meet ups)? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. Daily
    b. Weekly
    c. Monthly
    d. Rarely
    e. Prefer not to answer
15. Do you ever give advice to other people interested in Lolita fashion? (Please select the closest answer)
    a. Yes, but only online
    b. Yes, but only in person
    c. Yes, online and in person

d. No
e. Prefer not to answer

16. What kind of things do you admire in a person who wears Lolita? (Please select all that apply)
    a. Their creativity in outfits
    b. Their ability to follow the Lolita silhouette and rules
    c. Their status as a moderator in an online community
    d. Their high level of involvement in an online community
    e. Their high level of involvement at in-person community events
    f. Their hosting of meet ups
    g. Their length of involvement with Lolita fashion
    h. Other (_____)
    i. Prefer not to answer
17. When wearing Lolita fashion, how important do you believe it is to wear…. (Please select the closest answers)
    a. Socks or tights?
        i. Not important
        ii. Not too important
        iii. Neutral
        iv. A little important
        v. Important
        vi. Prefer not to answer
    b. A blouse under a jumperskirt (JSK)?
        i. Not important
        ii. Not too important
        iii. Neutral
        iv. A little important
        v. Important
        vi. Prefer not to answer
    c. A petticoat?
        i. Not important
        ii. Not too important
        iii. Neutral
        iv. A little important
        v. Important
        vi. Prefer not to answer
    d. Bloomers or modesty shorts?
        i. Not important
        ii. Not too important
        iii. Neutral
        iv. A little important
        v. Important
        vi. Prefer not to answer
    e. A wig?
        i. Not important
        ii. Not too important

iii. Neutral
iv. A little important
v. Important
vi. Prefer not to answer

f. Make up?
i. Not important
ii. Not too important
iii. Neutral
iv. A little important
v. Important
vi. Prefer not to answer

18. What is your age?
    a. _____
19. Which gender do you identify with? (Please select one)
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Other (_____)
    d. Prefer not to answer
20. Which ethnicity describes you? (Please select one)
    a. White
    b. Hispanic / Latino
    c. Black /African American
    d. Native American / American Indian
    e. Asian / Pacific Islander
    f. Other (_____)
    g. Prefer not to answer
21. What is your marital status? (Please select one)
    a. Single, never married
    b. Married
    c. Divorced
    d. Widowed
    e. Prefer not to answer
22. Do you have any children? (Please select one)
    a. Yes, one child
    b. Yes, more than one child
    c. No
    d. Prefer not to answer
23. What is the highest level of school or degree you have completed? (Please select one)
    a. Some high school
    b. High school diploma or equivalent
    c. Some college
    d. Associate degree
    e. Bachelor's degree
    f. Master's degree
    g. Doctorate degree

h. Prefer not to answer

24. What best describes your occupation? (Please select one)
    a. Student
    b. Homemaker
    c. Self-Employed
    d. Employed
    e. Unemployed, looking for work
    f. Unemployed, not looking for work
    g. Retired
    h. Unable to work
    i. Prefer not to answer
25. What is your total annual household income? (Please select one)
    a. Less than $20,000
    b. $20,000 - $30,000
    c. $30,000 - $40,000
    d. $40,000 - $50,000
    e. $50,000 - $60,000
    f. $60,000 - $70,000
    g. $70,000 - $80,000
    h. $80,000 - $90,000
    i. $90,000 - $100,000
    j. More than $100,000
    k. Prefer not to answer

Appendix E. South Florida Survey Results

Houston Lolita Community Survey Results

Question	Answers	Number of answers	% of total
1: Consent	Yes	37	94.87%
	No	2	5.13%
2: Do you currently live in the Greater Houston area? (Please select the closest answer)	Yes	29	85.29%
	Used to	1	2.94%
	Planning to	1	2.94%
	Family	2	5.88%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	1	2.94%
3: How did you first find out about Lolita fashion? (Please select the closest answer)	Japanese culture	24	70.59%
	Fashion culture	5	14.71%
	Friend	3	8.82%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	2	5.88%
4: How long have you been actively interested in Lolita fashion?	< 1 year	1	3.03%
	1-1.5 years	3	9.09%
	2-2.5 years	4	12.12%
	3-3.5 years	3	9.09%
	4-4.5 years	5	15.15%
	5-5.5 years	2	6.06%
	6-6.5 years	2	6.06%
	7-7.5 years	2	6.06%
	8-8.5 years	1	3.03%
	9-9.5 years	1	3.03%
	10+ years	9	27.27%
5: Which substyle(s) of Lolita fashion do you currently prefer? (Please select all that apply)	Sweet	18	52.94%
	Gothic	23	67.65%
	Classic	26	76.47%
	Other	4	11.76%
6: Has your preference changed since you were first interested? If so, which style(s) did you use to prefer? (Please select all that apply)	Sweet	13	38.24%
	Gothic	13	38.24%
	Classic	4	11.76%
	No change	11	32.35%
	Prefer not to answer	1	2.94%
	Other	3	8.82%

7: Do you think you will ever stop wearing/being interested in Lolita? (Please select all that apply)	Getting older	17	50.00%
	Taste changes	18	52.94%
	Change jobs	0	0.00%
	Start a family	6	17.65%
	Bad experience	6	17.65%
	Financial	7	20.59%
	Less popularity	4	11.76%
	No	10	29.41%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	0	0.00%
8: Do you currently wear Lolita clothing?	Yes	29	85.29%
	No	3	8.82%
	Prefer not to answer	2	5.88%
9: When do you wear Lolita clothing? (Please select the closest answer)	Everyday	1	3.23%
	Occasionally	15	48.39%
	Rarely/special events	6	19.35%
	Lolita stuff	9	29.03%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
10: How long have you been wearing it?	< 1 year	3	9.68%
	1-1.5 years	5	16.13%
	2-2.5 years	4	12.90%
	3-3.5 years	5	16.13%
	4-4.5 years	5	16.13%
	5-5.5 years	2	6.45%
	6-6.5 years	1	3.23%
	7-7.5 years	2	6.45%
	8-8.5 years	2	6.45%
	9-9.5 years	1	3.23%
	10+ years	1	3.23%
11: What is Lolita to you? (Please select all that apply)	Clothing	33	100.00%
	Costume	1	3.03%
	Interest	28	84.85%
	Hobby	26	78.79%
	Lifestyle	11	33.33%

12: How did you find out about the Houston Lolita Community Facebook community? (Please select the closest answer)	Large online Lolita community	8	24.24%
	Friend or member	12	36.36%
	Facebook search	8	24.24%
	Google	3	9.09%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	2	6.06%
13: How long have you been involved with the Houston Lolita Community Facebook community?	<1	10	30.30%
	1-1.5	7	21.21%
	2-2.5	7	21.21%
	3-3.5	5	15.15%
	4-4.5	4	12.12%
	5+	0	0.00%
14: How often do you engage with the Houston Lolita Community Facebook group online? (Please select the closest answer)	Daily	2	6.06%
	Weekly	3	9.09%
	Monthly	10	30.30%
	Rarely	15	45.45%
	Prefer not to answer	3	9.09%
15: How often do you participate in-person with the Houston Lolita Community Facebook community (ex: going to meet ups)? (Please select the closest answer)	Daily	0	0.00%
	Weekly	0	0.00%
	Monthly	9	27.27%
	Rarely	20	60.61%
	Prefer not to answer	4	12.12%
16: Do you ever give advice to other people interested in Lolita fashion? (Please select the closest answer)	Only online	7	21.21%
	Only in-person	5	15.15%
	Yes, both	17	51.52%
	No	4	12.12%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
17: What kind of things do you admire in a person who wears Lolita? (Please select all that apply)	Creativity	33	100.00%
	Ability to follow rules	21	63.64%
	Mod status	4	12.12%
	Online involvement	5	15.15%
	In-person involvement	11	33.33%
	Hosting of meet-ups	10	30.30%
	Length of involvement	10	30.30%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	7	21.21%

18: When wearing Lolita fashion, how important do you believe it is to wear…. (Please select the closest answers)	See Figure 21		
19: What is your age?	18-19	7	23.33%
	20-23	7	23.33%
	24-26	9	30.00%
	27-29	7	23.33%
	30+	0	0.00%
20: Which gender do you identify with? (Please select one)	Female	26	83.87%
	Male	1	3.23%
	Prefer not to answer	2	6.45%
	Other	2	6.45%
21: Which ethnicity describes you? (Please select one)	White	19	61.29%
	Hispanic	6	19.35%
	Black	0	0.00%
	Native American	0	0.00%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	4	12.90%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	2	6.45%
22: What is your marital status? (Please select one)	Single	22	70.97%
	Married	6	19.35%
	Divorced	1	3.23%
	Widowed	0	0.00%
	Prefer not to answer	2	6.45%
23: Do you have any children? (Please select one)	One	1	3.23%
	More than one	0	0.00%
	No	30	96.77%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
24: What is the highest level of school or degree you have completed? (Please select one)	Some high school	2	6.45%
	High school degree	5	16.13%
	Some college	11	35.48%
	Associates	1	3.23%
	Bachelor's	11	35.48%
	Master's	1	3.23%
	Doctorate	0	0.00%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%

25: What best describes your occupation? (Please select one)	Student	12	38.71%
	Homemaker	0	0.00%
	Self-employed	2	6.45%
	Employed	12	38.71%
	Unemployed, looking	4	12.90%
	Unemployed, not looking	1	3.23%
	Retired	0	0.00%
	Unable to work	0	0.00%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
26: What is your total annual household income? (Please select one)	<$20,000	2	6.45%
	$20,000-$30,000	4	12.90%
	$30,000-$40,000	2	6.45%
	$40,000-$50,000	3	9.68%
	$50,000-$60,000	3	9.68%
	$60,000-$70,000	2	6.45%
	$70,000-$80,000	2	6.45%
	$80,000-$90,000	1	3.23%
	$90,000-$100,000	2	6.45%
	$100,000+	2	6.45%
	Prefer not to answer	8	25.81%

Appendix F. Houston Survey Results

South Florida Lolitas Survey Results

Question	Answers	Number of answers	% of total
1: Consent	Yes	18	100.00%
	No	0	0.00%
2: Do you currently live in the South Florida area? (Please select the closest answer)	Yes	15	83.33%
	Used to	2	11.11%
	Planning to	0	0.00%
	Family	1	5.56%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	0	0.00%
3: How did you first find out about Lolita fashion? (Please select the closest answer)	Japanese culture	10	55.56%
	Fashion culture	6	33.33%
	Friend	0	0.00%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	2	11.11%
4: How long have you been actively interested in Lolita fashion?	< 1 year	0	0.00%
	1-1.5 years	1	5.88%
	2-2.5 years	1	5.88%
	3-3.5 years	2	11.76%
	4-4.5 years	0	0.00%
	5-5.5 years	2	11.76%
	6-6.5 years	3	17.65%
	7-7.5 years	1	5.88%
	8-8.5 years	1	5.88%
	9-9.5 years	1	5.88%
	10+ years	5	29.41%
5: Which substyle(s) of Lolita fashion do you currently prefer? (Please select all that apply)	Sweet	7	38.89%
	Gothic	8	44.44%
	Classic	12	66.67%
	Other	4	22.22%
6: Has your preference changed since you were first interested? If so, which style(s) did you use to prefer? (Please select all that apply)	Sweet	6	33.33%
	Gothic	5	27.78%
	Classic	4	22.22%
	No change	7	38.89%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	1	5.56%

7: Do you think you will ever stop wearing/being interested in Lolita? (Please select all that apply)	Getting older	7	38.89%
	Taste changes	9	50.00%
	Change jobs	1	5.56%
	Start a family	1	5.56%
	Bad experience	2	11.11%
	Financial	5	27.78%
	Less popularity	1	5.56%
	No	7	38.89%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	1	5.56%
8: Do you currently wear Lolita clothing?	Yes	17	94.44%
	No	1	5.56%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
9: When do you wear Lolita clothing? (Please select the closest answer)	Everyday	0	0.00%
	Occasionally	8	47.06%
	Rarely/special events	2	11.76%
	Lolita stuff	7	41.18%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
10: How long have you been wearing it?	< 1 year	0	0.00%
	1-1.5 years	1	5.88%
	2-2.5 years	5	29.41%
	3-3.5 years	2	11.76%
	4-4.5 years	4	23.53%
	5-5.5 years	1	5.88%
	6-6.5 years	2	11.76%
	7-7.5 years	0	0.00%
	8-8.5 years	0	0.00%
	9-9.5 years	1	5.88%
	10+ years	1	5.88%
11: What is Lolita to you? (Please select all that apply)	Clothing	17	94.44%
	Costume	1	5.56%
	Interest	9	50.00%
	Hobby	17	94.44%
	Lifestyle	5	27.78%

12: How did you find out about the South Florida Lolitas Facebook community? (Please select the closest answer)	Large online Lolita community	4	22.22%
	Friend or member	11	61.11%
	Facebook search	1	5.56%
	Google	1	5.56%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	1	5.56%
13: How long have you been involved with the South Florida Lolitas Facebook community?	<1	3	16.67%
	1-1.5	3	16.67%
	2-2.5	3	16.67%
	3-3.5	3	16.67%
	4-4.5	2	11.11%
	5+	4	22.22%
14: How often do you engage with the South Florida Lolitas Facebook group online? (Please select the closest answer)	Daily	2	11.11%
	Weekly	8	44.44%
	Monthly	3	16.67%
	Rarely	5	27.78%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
15: How often do you participate in-person with the South Florida Lolitas Facebook community (ex: going to meet ups)? (Please select the closest answer)	Daily	0	0.00%
	Weekly	0	0.00%
	Monthly	11	61.11%
	Rarely	5	27.78%
	Prefer not to answer	2	11.11%
16: Do you ever give advice to other people interested in Lolita fashion? (Please select the closest answer)	Only online	4	22.22%
	Only in-person	3	16.67%
	Yes, both	7	38.89%
	No	4	22.22%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
17: What kind of things do you admire in a person who wears Lolita? (Please select all that apply)	Creativity	18	100.00%
	Ability to follow rules	8	44.44%
	Mod status	1	5.56%
	Online involvement	8	44.44%
	In-person involvement	13	72.22%
	Hosting of meet-ups	9	50.00%
	Length of involvement	4	22.22%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	0	0.00%

18: When wearing Lolita fashion, how important do you believe it is to wear…. (Please select the closest answers)	See Figure 21		
19: What is your age?	18-19	2	11.11%
	20-23	4	20.00%
	24-26	5	23.81%
	27-29	5	23.81%
	30+	2	11.11%
20: Which gender do you identify with? (Please select one)	Female	17	94.44%
	Male	0	0.00%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	1	5.56%
21: Which ethnicity describes you? (Please select one)	White	6	33.33%
	Hispanic	6	33.33%
	Black	4	22.22%
	Native American	0	0.00%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	1	5.56%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	1	5.56%
22: What is your marital status? (Please select one)	Single	12	66.67%
	Married	5	27.78%
	Divorced	1	5.56%
	Widowed	0	0.00%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
23: Do you have any children? (Please select one)	One	0	0.00%
	More than one	2	11.11%
	No	16	88.89%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
24: What is the highest level of school or degree you have completed? (Please select one)	Some high school	1	5.56%
	High school degree	0	0.00%
	Some college	9	50.00%
	Associates	3	16.67%
	Bachelor's	3	16.67%
	Master's	2	11.11%
	Doctorate	0	0.00%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%

25: What best describes your occupation? (Please select one)	Student	6	33.33%
	Homemaker	1	5.56%
	Self-employed	4	22.22%
	Employed	6	33.33%
	Unemployed, looking	0	0.00%
	Unemployed, not looking	0	0.00%
	Retired	0	0.00%
	Unable to work	1	5.56%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
26: What is your total annual household income? (Please select one)	<$20,000	4	22.22%
	$20,000-$30,000	4	22.22%
	$30,000-$40,000	1	5.56%
	$40,000-$50,000	2	11.11%
	$50,000-$60,000	0	0.00%
	$60,000-$70,000	0	0.00%
	$70,000-$80,000	0	0.00%
	$80,000-$90,000	2	11.11%
	$90,000-$100,000	0	0.00%
	$100,000+	3	16.67%
	Prefer not to answer	2	11.11%

Appendix G. Combined Survey Results

Combined Survey Results

Question	Answers	Number of answers	% of total
1: Consent	Yes	55	96.49%
	No	2	3.51%
2: Do you currently live in the local area? (Please select the closest answer)	Yes	44	84.62%
	Used to	3	5.77%
	Planning to	1	1.92%
	Family	3	5.77%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	1	1.92%
3: How did you first find out about Lolita fashion? (Please select the closest answer)	Japanese culture	34	65.38%
	Fashion culture	11	21.15%
	Friend	3	5.77%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	4	7.69%
4: How long have you been actively interested in Lolita fashion?	< 1 year	1	2.00%
	1-1.5 years	4	8.00%
	2-2.5 years	5	10.00%
	3-3.5 years	5	10.00%
	4-4.5 years	5	10.00%
	5-5.5 years	4	8.00%
	6-6.5 years	5	10.00%
	7-7.5 years	3	6.00%
	8-8.5 years	2	4.00%
	9-9.5 years	2	4.00%
	10+ years	14	28.00%
5: Which substyle(s) of Lolita fashion do you currently prefer? (Please select all that apply)	Sweet	25	48.08%
	Gothic	31	59.62%
	Classic	38	73.08%
	Other	8	15.38%
6: Has your preference changed since you were first interested? If so, which style(s) did you use to prefer? (Please select all that apply)	Sweet	19	36.54%
	Gothic	18	34.62%
	Classic	8	15.38%
	No change	18	34.62%
	Prefer not to answer	1	1.92%
	Other	4	7.69%

7: Do you think you will ever stop wearing/being interested in Lolita? (Please select all that apply)	Getting older	24	46.15%
	Taste changes	27	51.92%
	Change jobs	1	1.92%
	Start a family	7	13.46%
	Bad experience	8	15.38%
	Financial	12	23.08%
	Less popularity	5	9.62%
	No	17	32.69%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	1	1.92%
8: Do you currently wear Lolita clothing?	Yes	46	88.46%
	No	4	7.69%
	Prefer not to answer	2	3.85%
9: When do you wear Lolita clothing? (Please select the closest answer)	Everyday	1	2.08%
	Occasionally	23	47.92%
	Rarely/special events	8	16.67%
	Lolita stuff	16	33.33%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
10: How long have you been wearing it?	< 1 year	3	6.25%
	1-1.5 years	6	12.50%
	2-2.5 years	9	18.75%
	3-3.5 years	7	14.58%
	4-4.5 years	9	18.75%
	5-5.5 years	3	6.25%
	6-6.5 years	3	6.25%
	7-7.5 years	2	4.17%
	8-8.5 years	2	4.17%
	9-9.5 years	2	4.17%
	10+ years	2	4.17%
11: What is Lolita to you? (Please select all that apply)	Clothing	50	98.04%
	Costume	2	3.92%
	Interest	37	72.55%
	Hobby	43	84.31%
	Lifestyle	16	31.37%

12: How did you find out about the local Lolita Facebook community? (Please select the closest answer)	Large online Lolita community	12	23.53%
	Friend or member	23	45.10%
	Facebook search	9	17.65%
	Google	4	7.84%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	3	5.88%
13: How long have you been involved with the local Lolita Facebook community?	<1	13	25.49%
	1-1.5	10	19.61%
	2-2.5	10	19.61%
	3-3.5	8	15.69%
	4-4.5	6	11.76%
	5+	4	7.84%
14: How often do you engage with the local Lolita Facebook group online? (Please select the closest answer)	Daily	4	7.84%
	Weekly	11	21.57%
	Monthly	13	25.49%
	Rarely	20	39.22%
	Prefer not to answer	3	5.88%
15: How often do you participate in-person with the local Lolita Facebook community (ex: going to meet ups)? (Please select the closest answer)	Daily	0	0.00%
	Weekly	0	0.00%
	Monthly	20	39.22%
	Rarely	25	49.02%
	Prefer not to answer	6	11.76%
16: Do you ever give advice to other people interested in Lolita fashion? (Please select the closest answer)	Only online	11	21.57%
	Only in-person	8	15.69%
	Yes, both	24	47.06%
	No	8	15.69%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
17: What kind of things do you admire in a person who wears Lolita? (Please select all that apply)	Creativity	51	100.00%
	Ability to follow rules	29	56.86%
	Mod status	5	9.80%
	Online involvement	13	25.49%
	In-person involvement	24	47.06%
	Hosting of meet-ups	19	37.25%
	Length of involvement	14	27.45%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	7	13.73%

18: When wearing Lolita fashion, how important do you believe it is to wear…. (Please select the closest answers)	See Figure 21		
19: What is your age?	18-19	9	18.75%
	20-23	11	22.92%
	24-26	14	29.17%
	27-29	12	25.00%
	30+	2	4.17%
20: Which gender do you identify with? (Please select one)	Female	43	87.76%
	Male	1	2.04%
	Prefer not to answer	2	4.08%
	Other	3	6.12%
21: Which ethnicity describes you? (Please select one)	White	25	51.02%
	Hispanic	12	24.49%
	Black	4	8.16%
	Native American	0	0.00%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	5	10.20%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
	Other	3	6.12%
22: What is your marital status? (Please select one)	Single	34	69.39%
	Married	11	22.45%
	Divorced	2	4.08%
	Widowed	0	0.00%
	Prefer not to answer	2	4.08%
23: Do you have any children? (Please select one)	One	1	2.04%
	More than one	2	4.08%
	No	46	93.88%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
24: What is the highest level of school or degree you have completed? (Please select one)	Some high school	3	6.12%
	High school degree	5	10.20%
	Some college	20	40.82%
	Associates	4	8.16%
	Bachelor's	14	28.57%
	Master's	3	6.12%
	Doctorate	0	0.00%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%

25: What best describes your occupation? (Please select one)	Student	18	36.73%
	Homemaker	1	2.04%
	Self-employed	6	12.24%
	Employed	18	36.73%
	Unemployed, looking	4	8.16%
	Unemployed, not looking	1	2.04%
	Retired	0	0.00%
	Unable to work	1	2.04%
	Prefer not to answer	0	0.00%
26: What is your total annual household income? (Please select one)	<$20,000	6	12.24%
	$20,000-$30,000	8	16.33%
	$30,000-$40,000	3	6.12%
	$40,000-$50,000	5	10.20%
	$50,000-$60,000	3	6.12%
	$60,000-$70,000	2	4.08%
	$70,000-$80,000	2	4.08%
	$80,000-$90,000	3	6.12%
	$90,000-$100,000	2	4.08%
	$100,000+	5	10.20%
	Prefer not to answer	10	20.41%

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